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Vol. I.

## ROVING JOE: THE HISTORY of a "BORDER BOY."

Brief Scenes from the Life of Joseph E. Badger, Jr.

BY A. H. POST.



Beadle's

# HALF DIME

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THE SOLE REMAINING INSTITUTION SAID HANG FAST, AND HANG ON HE DID WITH THE GRIP OF DEATH.

# ROVING JOE:

## The History of a "Border Boy."

Brief Scenes From the Life of  
Joseph E. Badger, Jr.

BY A. H. POST.

### INTRODUCTORY.

To MY BOY READER:

Your publishers have asked me, as an old friend and "side-partner" of one who has written a good many stories for you, to furnish them with a brief history of Mr. Badger's early career, he having declined to do so. The result is now before you.

I wish to say one word as a friend to both you and him. All that follows, I believe is strictly true, but however interesting it may read, I would not advise you to follow the example set by "Roving Joe." A full score of years have passed since he ran away from home, but even now he has not forgotten the deep grief and anxiety his conduct caused his loving parents. His eyes glisten and his cheeks flush as he recalls the wild, free life he led in those boyish days—the "prairie fever" has never left him, nor will it ever—but he often regrets that those youthful years were not more wisely spent. In these days a school-book is far more valuable than the hunter's rifle. Stick to your studies at least until your beard be grown. Time enough then to take a holiday.

Your Friend, THE AUTHOR.

### CHAPTER I.

RUNNING AWAY FROM HOME.

"COME go 'long, Joe."

"I'll do it."

A careless laugh followed this emphatic declaration, for none who heard the words dreamed of their being any more than a boyish boast. Crack went the long whip-lashes, the wide-horned steers bent to their yokes and the heavily-laden freight-wagons entered upon the long trail to Denver. Among the women and children and old men who had gathered to witness the start and wish "the boys" good luck and a speedy trip, stood the lad to whom the wagon-boss, George Clark, had called. His face was the soberest, hardest set of all, for he had formed a resolution that was to shape his entire future. He was last to turn away, his steady gaze ending only when the slowly-moving train crossed over the ridge far away in the West, where the freighters turned to take their last look at home for many months.

Joe—then, as to-day, no one ever thought of giving him a more formal title—watched until the dust-cloud died away, then returned to his wood-pile, working hard but thinking harder.

He was born October 10th, 1848, at Payson, Ills. When he was one year old his parents moved to Quincy, in the same State, again removing in 1858, this time to the then Territory of Kansas, settling at a new village called Bellemont, situated on the high bluffs some half a

dozen miles up the Missouri river from St. Joseph.

This city was then a favorite outfitting point and rendezvous for prairie traders, trappers and freighters. A steam ferry ran between the city and Bellemont, its tariff being the same as the boats running straight across the river to Ellwood, though by the latter route a five mile bottom of heavy "gumbo" had to be pulled through. This will explain why Bellemont was such a favorite starting point for the plains, and in a measure, the strong attack of "prairie fever" which little Joe experienced. Every spare moment was spent in the company of some mountain man—Indian, half breed or white. Besides, this roving fever was inherited. Among the first to make the overland trip to California on the discovery of gold, were his father and two uncles, one of whom never returned, his fate a mystery to this day.

The Pike's Peak fever was at its height. The level valley just west of Joe's home was a favorite camping spot, and here he remembers holding the pot of black paint that produced the words every one has read of—"Pike's Peak or Bust!" And here he saw the wagon on its return, the dingy, ragged tilt bearing on the opposite side the eloquent legend "Busted, by—"

Denver suddenly sprung into existence. It, and the many mining camps had to be supplied with provisions. There were no railroads, and thus were born the hardy race of freighters, alias "bullwhackers." Nearly every man in and around Bellemont took the fever, and in several instances, boys as young as Joe was, made the trip with their brothers or fathers. Many a time he pleaded for permission to go, but in vain. He was the eldest boy of the family, and after the first year, his father was away from home, earning a living for them all.

With his horse, rifle and dog, Joe managed to smother his roving instincts for a time, but at length he was conquered, and when he answered George Clark, he meant exactly what he said.

Secretly he made his preparations that day, and when he went to bed at night, it was with no intention of sleeping.

When all the rest were sound asleep, he stole softly down stairs, and leaving a note on the dining-table, stating that he was going for a day's hunt up in the Burr Oak Bottom, he left the house, laughing in boyish fashion at his *ruse*, never once thinking what terrible grief and anxiety that lie was to cause his parents, when the days passed on without his return, and all search for him was in vain.

"They won't think of looking after me before day after to-morrow, and by that time I'll be safe enough."

It did not take long for Joe to prepare his horse—a light built chestnut half-blood with white stockings and blaze, swift as a deer and as tireless—for he never rode with a saddle. Strapping on a blanket, he fastened a bundle of provisions on his back, took his rifle and rode along the trail to Denver.

At day-dawn he came in sight of the camp-fires kindled for breakfast by the Clark train, but he did not join them then, for he knew that George would surely take him back home. All that day he dogged the slowly moving ox-

wagons, lying out on the prairie at night, to follow the same tactics on the next day and the next.

On the morning of the fourth day, he mounted Pet, his horse, and rode into camp, outwardly cool and composed, alighting and addressing the astonished freighters:

"I told you I'd come, and here I am, hungry as a wolf!"

For answer, George Clark arose and grasped the little rascal, his big blue eyes flashing ominously as he demanded:

"Did your mother say you might follow us?"

Joe hesitated for a moment, strongly tempted to lie, but he felt that those keen eyes would read the truth.

"No, she didn't, 'cause I didn't ask."

"You little rascal!" and Joe has often declared that he could hear his bones rattle as the angry freighter lifted him from the ground, shaking him as a terrier might a rat.

The kindest, jolliest fellow in the world when not crossed, George Clark was terrible when enraged as now, and Joe would have fared badly but for the interference of the others.

Dropping him, George turned away and spoke no more until he had eaten his fill. Joe's heart sunk as he covertly watched the wagon-boss, for he saw that he was as angry as ever, though outwardly more cool. Silently Clark gave the lad food, and watched him eat. Then he spoke:

"If your mother had given her consent, I would like to have you along, Joe, for there's the making of a man in you, but as it is, you've got to turn back. The trail is plain enough. You can't miss it with your eyes open. Straddle your horse and light out."

"I won't turn back until I see Denver," sullenly muttered Joe. "All the boys would laugh at me, and say I was afraid."

With a short, hard laugh, Clark picked up his bull-whip—a hickory handle, eighteen inches long, with a plaited lash of buckskin, twenty-five feet in length, thick as a man's wrist eight feet from the handle, then tapering gradually to a point. A terrible weapon in the hands of one skilled in its use, and Joe says that he never saw one who could equal George Clark in that respect. He could kill a fly without ruffling a hair of the ox it was resting upon. A common feat was to stick a pin in the cracker and at twenty-five feet plant it in the center of a playing-card. And once, when enraged by an obstinate steer, he, in two successive blows, cut off each ear close to the poor creature's head.

"Back you go, boy, or I swear I'll paint a map of the trail to Denver on your carcass in red ink!" he uttered, swinging the heavy lash back until it lay straight on the ground behind him.

None of the others dared interfere now, while Clark's eyes blazed like that. In his rage he knew no friend, and a wounded grizzly was not more dangerous. But little Joe had a spirit of his own, and leaping back, he cocked his rifle and leveled it—not at George, but at one of the wagon-master's oxen.

"You whip and I'll shoot!" he cried. "See which'll get tired of the fun first!"

George hesitated. Had the weapon been lev-

eled at himself, he would have laughed, but he knew that Joe would shoot at his first motion, and he knew, too, that the little rascal could plant his lead true as the oldest marksman in the land.

"Swear you won't touch me with that whip, or down goes your beef!" added Joe, encouraged by the general laugh which broke from the other men.

"All right—I won't whip you," and Clark dropped the weapon, while Joe lowered his rifle. "All the same, you ain't going 'long with this train. Climb onto Pet, and pull out. Go home and set your mother's mind at rest, and on our next trip I promise to get her permission for you to go with us."

This was wise and kindly advice, but like many another foolish boy Joe considered himself the best judge of what was best. Elated with the victory already won, he replied:

"I'm going to Denver now!"

He knew that time was money to the freighters, and felt confident that they would not lose several days in turning back with him. He laughed aloud at this thought, but the next instant he thought a whirlwind had struck him.

Clark grabbed and flung him upon Pet's back, thrust the rifle into his hands, then struck the horse heavily. Like a flash Pet darted away out of camp, and the freighters began putting their oxen to.

But Joe was not so easily conquered. He had started out to go to Denver, and he intended to make the trip. All day he hung around the train, in sight of, but without the reach of the bullwhackers. He did not close his eyes that night for fear Clark would steal upon him and take him prisoner.

The same tactics were pursued on the next day until near night, when Clark, despairing of tiring the boy out, and fearful lest some evil might befall him, sounded a parley.

His anger had cooled down, and his words were those of a true friend, but the little rascal would not listen to reason.

"Mother'll guess where I've gone," he persisted. "Then you can send word back by the first train we meet. She'll know I'm safe enough with you, boy."

To turn back to take the lad home would mean the loss of all profit on the trip, and there was no other way to get rid of him, so Clark was forced to make the best of a bad bargain. It may be added here that word was sent by a train, but the message was never delivered, and for six months Joe's parents knew not whether he was alive or dead, or where he was.

From that day Joe was enlisted as hunter for the train, and right well he filled the position for so young a lad.

## CHAPTER II.

### ROVING JOE'S FIRST SCALP.

FOR the first week or two out Joe had a jolly good time. He had no regular duties save that of keeping the train men in fresh meat. Game was abundant and tame, he was a fine rifle-shot, and there were only five mouths besides his own to fill, the train consisting of but three wagons. The bull-teams made but com-

paratively slow progress, and Joe, on Pet, could make wide detours from the trail after game.

As yet he had brought to bag nothing of more value than antelope, the staple game so far having been pinnated and sharp-tailed grouse, "cotton-tails" and jack-rabbits. But there were occasional buffalo-chips to be found now, and each day, as he rode away from the train, Joe mentally resolved that before another night fell he would lay at least one buffalo low.

The train was late one night in reaching water, and, as the creek crossing was an unusually difficult one, Clark was forced to wait for daylight before making the attempt, though he knew the value of the old prairie rule: never camp on the near side of a stream, however small. Its wisdom was proved that very night. A tremendous rain-storm came on, and by morning the little creek was a roaring river.

George Clark ripped out a few oaths when he saw this, then turned to Joe, saying:

"You may as well lay in a stock of meat, Joe. We're stuck here for two days, if we can cross even then."

"Better keep in sight, boy," put in one of the others, seriously. "We're getting nigh the buffalo country now, and where you find them you're pretty sure to strike red-skins. I saw fresh signs near where we nooned yesterday."

"I'll eat all the red-skins I see to-day," Joe laughed.

The boyish boast came readily enough, and the little rascal thought it sounded manly, but he was to learn better before that day ended. He admits now that he sorely needed just such a lesson as was in store for him, for his self-conceit was growing out of all proportions.

"Don't you be too sure, boy," added the kindly teamster. "Not that it'd be much loss if you should get picked off, only for your mother's sake. Mind. If you get into trouble empty this as fast as you can," handing the lad a revolver. "We'll come if we hear you—not because you're worth the trouble, but your mother might fret if we came back without her cub."

Joe was used to old Bob's grumpy ways, and taking the proffered weapon, rode away with a light laugh. He had never encountered real danger, and consequently did not know what personal fear meant.

Joe had not ridden a mile from camp before he sighted a large, dark object which he knew must be a buffalo. Several times of late he had caught distant glimpses of the huge creatures, but never near enough for a chase.

Like many an older and more experienced hunter before him, Joe caught the "back ager" right away. He shook from head to foot, and curious chills ran all over him, but still he had sense enough left to slip from the back of his horse into the tall grass.

Like a flash he remembered all that he had ever read about the different modes of hunting the buffalo. Of them all, his favorite idea had been to run one down and kill it on the jump, but great as was his excitement, he remembered Bob's warning, and this decided him against a chase which might lead him miles away. Each moment of delay was steadyng his nerves, and as the bull buffalo gave no sign of suspicion, Joe looked his fill.

The animal was quietly grazing in a valley, flanked on one side by a long, low bluff, upon the other by the prairie swell near the crest of which the boy hunter now knelt. Between the bull and the bluff, Joe could trace a shallow ditch formed by the water draining from the higher ground. This was now nearly dry; before the rain it had been quite so.

Seeing this decided Joe. He believed he could stalk the game successfully, making use of the draw to cover his approach, and backing behind the swell, he left his horse unhitched, lowering the reins and bidding him "watch." That was enough. Pet had accompanied his young master on too many hunting excursions to forget his teachings, now. He would hold his ground until he heard Joe call him.

A sharp run carried the lad to the water-worn ditch at a point hidden from the buffalo by the bluff, and entering it, Joe stole along, stooping low beneath the bank as he neared his game. He did not greatly fear its taking alarm, as the ground was moist and his moccasined feet hardly gave sound sufficient to reach his own ears. And the buffalo—as is almost invariably the case, unless during the annual migrations of a herd—was feeding up the wind—that is away from Joe, as the faint breeze fanned his heated face. So there was no danger of the scent betraying him.

By cautious work worthy an older hunter, Joe gained a point just abreast the bull—a large and magnificent specimen—and prepared for work.

A bunch of grass growing on the edge of the bank was all that could be desired in the way of cover while taking aim, and thrusting his rifle through this, securing a dead rest, Joe drew bead on his first large game, not two score yards away. A finer opportunity was never offered, yet Joe hesitated as he recalled the many yarns he had listened to concerning the ferocity displayed by these "old rogue" bulls, when wounded. He had but the one shot—for a revolver in case of a charge would count but little—and as I have heard him confess, he was strongly tempted to "take water" without shooting.

For full five minutes that doubt lasted, but then the bul' moved its left leg forward, revealing the skin over the heart where the hair was worn short, and instinctively covering this Joe touched the hair-trigger.

What followed, Joe can tell best.

"The next I remember, I was peering over the edge of the bank, a hundred yards from where I dropped my rifle. And what a proud lad I was when I saw that bull lying upon its belly, its fore legs doubled beneath it, thrown in its tracks by a single bullet! I gave a yell of triumph that, as I afterward learned, was heard at camp, and danced a 'breakdown' to celebrate the killing of my first buffalo."

Notwithstanding his excitement, Joe recovered his rifle and carefully reloaded it before leaving the ditch, a lesson of precaution taught him by his hunting mentor, Pete Shafer, and one never forgotten.

Joe ran to where the buffalo-bull lay, the stoutest lad of his age in the land, but a snort of affright from Pet, who had come forward at his shout, broke the spell.

He wheeled and galloped away at full speed, seemingly terrified at sight of the dead monster. Joe yelled angrily after him, but the horse only ran the faster, heading straight for camp. It seemed a scurvy trick, but in the end it was probably the means of saving his life.

A few moments later, Joe had something even less agreeable to occupy his mind. The dull thud of distant hoof-strokes came to his ears, and turning toward the point from whence the sounds came, he saw a clump of horsemen appear at some distance along the bluff. It did not take more than one glance to tell him who and what those horsemen were. The long lances, the loose drapery, the fantastic head-dresses, could only belong to Indians.

Acting on the impulse of the moment, Joe grasped his rifle and ran back to the ditch, hoping thus to escape their notice. Strangely enough, he never once thought of them as other than "bad Indians," though, as a general thing, the red-men were friendly at that time; that is, where the force confronting them was too strong to be handled easily.

Joe quickly saw that his hopes of escaping discovery were vain. As they galloped along the bluff, he could see them unslinging their bows. The same glance showed him that he could not hope to cover himself in the draw. From the edge of the bluff, the Indians could rain their arrows down upon him, their elevated position completely commanding the shallow ditch.

Joe leaped from the ditch and ran back to where lay the dead buffalo. For a moment he entertained the mad idea of trying a dead run for camp, but as the red-skins recklessly slid their ponies down the rain-guttered side of the bluff, he saw the folly of such a move. They would speedily overhaul him, and he would have no chance of striking a blow in return. In that instant there flashed across his mind the advice Pete Shafer had often given him—to show the enemy a bold front and hold his fire as long as possible.

This thought seemed to steady the boy's nerves, and though at first he had been frightened almost out of his senses, from that moment he was cool enough.

"I was too badly frightened to be scared," as Joe himself puts it, when telling the story.

Joe yelled at the Indians, and made the prairie signal for them to halt, by holding up his right hand with open palm toward them, moving it steadily back and forth.

They did pause, but not for long; then, dividing, two and three, the five dashed swiftly around until they got between him and camp.

Joe knew then that they meant mischief, and kneeling down beside the buffalo, he thrust his wiping-stick into the ground and holding his rifle against it with his left hand, formed a steady rest. He remembered then what old Bob had told him, but feared to discharge his revolver lest it should provoke the red-skins to a desperate assault.

Joe could see that the Indians had at least two rifles among them, but they seemed aware of their proximity to camp, and made no use of the fire-arms at that stage of the game. Riding swiftly to and fro, gradually drawing nearer the lad, they shot arrow after arrow in

that direction, though at such long range that nearly every one fell short of the mark. Doubtless they counted on confusing the boy by this mock attack, and drawing his fire at long range, then dash in and easily finish the job with their arrows before he could reload.

Bit by bit the range lessened, and as Joe saw the arrows begin to stick up in the hard ground all around him, he knew that his case was growing desperate. Still keeping the rifle at a level, by pressing it firmly back with his left hand, Joe drew his revolver and discharged four shots in swift succession, aiming at the Indians, but doing the swiftly-moving rascals no damage, as they sunk down behind their ponies' bodies at the first shot.

They seemed to divine the main object of these shots, and after a hurried consultation, one of their number dashed in a diagonal course toward the lad, as he drew within range sinking behind his pony, then, sweeping past at not more than a score yards distance, he discharged an arrow from under his animal's throat that, striking Joe's rifle-stock, glanced aside and cut a gash in his arm.

Joe had not time to glance at his hurt before a second brave spurred out to follow his comrade. The boy was growing excited and confused—just what the cunning rascals were working for—and he could scarcely refrain from firing as the savage swept by, though not even a heel was visible above the mustang's back, and the long mane hid the red-skin's face as he let loose his arrow.

It came so true that Joe felt the feathered end brush his cheek in its passage.

Joe could not watch the whole five, and the Indian who had made the first dash, did not ride far before halting his pony, leveling the rifle he carried with him.

At the third dash, Joe leaped up with a wild yell, and the pony, startled, bounded quickly to one side just as the Indian let fly his arrow. The Indian lost his balance, and hanging by one heel for a moment, fell heavily to the ground.

Joe covered him, but at that instant the first Indian fired, and the boy sunk upon his knees. He felt that he was hard hit, and as the red-skin uttered a wild yell of triumph, dashing forward to take the scalp he fancied he had won, Joe turned upon his knees and fired.

The bullet went straight to its mark, and the red-skin fell to the ground, shot through the brain.

Joe saw him fall, but that was all. A bloody mist seemed to pass before his eyes—he heard loud yells and the sound of fire-arms, but faint and indistinctly like one in a dream—then knew no more until he awoke to consciousness in camp.

Pet had raced straight back to the wagon train, and knowing the strong affection which existed between the lad and his favorite, knowing how perfectly the latter was trained, they suspected mischief, and arming, set out at once in the direction from whence the horse had come. Nor did they arrive a moment too soon.

They saw Joe fall, and then fire the avenging shot, and before the Indians could reach the lad, they opened fire.

One volley was enough, though not a bullet

found its mark. The cowardly rascals leaped upon their ponies again and fled in hot haste, not even trying to carry off their dead comrade.

No pursuit was made by the rescuers, for they were on foot. Besides, Joe's condition was critical. Through the red-skin's bullet, owing to the lad's leaping up, had only struck Joe in his left calf, a large artery was severed, and he was rapidly bleeding to death. Fortunately old Bob, who had studied medicine in his younger days, was able to take up the artery and stop the flow of blood.

Joe was carried to camp, where he soon came around. No effort was made to extract the bullet, for fear of again opening the lacerated artery, and he carries the lead to this day. As he often says, it answers the purpose of a barometer, and he would hardly know how to do without it.

When Joe had listened to how Pet had been the means of saving his life, old Bob brought forward a ghastly-looking object—no less than the head of the Indian killed.

"Tain't so pretty to look at," he laughed, as Joe shuddered, "but I thought it no more than right you should have a chance to raise the pelt you fairly earned. So! you've went through the motion often enough in play. Let's see if you're as good in practice as theory."

Joe performed the disgusting feat, though it went greatly against his stomach. He was only a boy, and afraid he would be laughed at if he refused. But he never repeated the action. The scalp of that Pawnee Pict was the first and the last scalp he ever "lifted."

### CHAPTER III. SAVED BY HIS HORSE.

HARDLY a fortnight passed before Joe was once more in riding condition and skirmishing around for fresh meat. His recent experience was of but little real benefit to him, thanks to the extravagant manner in which the train-men praised his performance, and Joe confesses that just then he honestly considered himself a revised and improved edition of Kit Carson, Davy Crockett & Co. I am afraid that, ere many days, the freighters were glad when they saw Joe ride forth after meat, for a brief space they would be freed from his incessant boasting.

I'm afraid some of you youngsters will begin to grow disgusted with my hero, he contrasts so unfavorably with the imaginary heroes whose fabulous deeds and faultless qualities you have secretly yearned to imitate, if not excel. But I set out to tell a plain, truthful story of how a young "border ruffian" spent his early days, as I warned you at the beginning. Joe was a boy, no better, no worse, than the generality of lads at his age, and for me to set him down as perfection would be to foolishly caricature the portrait I have been asked to draw for you.

Instead of learning prudence from his nearly fatal adventure, the fortunate outcome rendered Joe more confident in himself than ever, and all cautions were thrown away upon him.

Several days passed after Joe was recovered sufficiently to resume his duties as hunter before he fell in with any more buffalo. This he was eager to do, for he was anxious to try his horse in a chase and kill his game in real

sportsman fashion, while at full speed. Day after day he watched for his chance, and at length it came. From the crest of a prairie swell he caught sight of a small herd of a dozen buffalo, feeding nearly a mile distant from where he stood.

It was late in the afternoon, and Joe was already a considerable way from the train. The ground between him and the buffaloes was nearly level and perfectly devoid of cover sufficient to screen a footman, much less a horse. The direction of the wind and the lay of the ground was such that any attempt at turning the game was out of the question. The chase if any, must be a tail-on-end one, straight away from the Denver trail, and careless as he was, Roving Joe hesitated. Unluckily this interval of common sense was a brief one.

"Maybe I'll never have another chance," the boy muttered, wistfully eying the unsuspecting animals. "Pet can run around those clumsy brutes inside of a mile. I can knock one over at a single shot. A blind man couldn't get lost on an open prairie like this!"

Joe was only too willing to be convinced, and he felt that his reasoning was unanswerable. From that moment all doubts were at an end, and he had thoughts only for the big game ahead and how he could the most surely bring it to bag.

Thanks to his many long talks with old and experienced plainsmen, Joe, who had a very retentive memory on all such points, could tell you just how every species of game on our continent should be hunted, and now he put what he had learned into requisition. He emptied a couple of handfuls of powder from his horn into his right pocket, then filled his mouth with naked bullets and placed his caps where they could quickly be used. This done, he rode cautiously forward, watching the buffaloes closely.

When yet half a mile distant, the game took alarm, and tossing their shaggy manes, flitting their tails, they broke away in a lumbering gallop that seemed slow enough at first glance.

With a yell of boyish excitement, Joe dropped the reins and gave Pet full swing. The noble creature entered fully into the spirit of its master, and stretching out like a grayhound, the wild chase was begun.

The chestnut ran like a scared wolf, and his blood all afire, Joe yelled in shrill delight as he saw how rapidly the buffaloes were being overhauled. Already one portion of his boast was being verified; Pet was covering two yards to one made by the buffaloes, and in less than half an hour, Joe was carried alongside the hindmost animal.

He felt that the chase was as good as ended, as he raised his rifle and endeavored to sight the buffalo in a vital spot, for of course not more than a single shot would be necessary, since scarcely a dozen feet separated him from his game. But he soon realized that there was a vast difference between shooting from a dead rest at motionless bull, and firing from a running horse at a racing target. Pet ran low and smoothly, but the buffalo bobbed up and down like a cork in a storm tossed pond. The silver bead seemed dancing all over the monster's body, but at length Joe touched the hair-trig-

ger, feeling sure that the bullet would pierce the creature's heart.

Instead, it hit one fore leg, just above the hoof.

Joe leaned to one side, and Pet leaped abruptly in that direction, but the anticipated charge was not made. The bull, with a deep bellow, raced straight on, visibly limping as though its injured leg was giving way.

A little mortified by his failure, Joe attempted to reload his rifle as he had so often heard and read of its being done in running buffalo, Pet keeping within a few rods of the wounded bull.

Holding his rifle in his left hand, Joe took some loose powder from his pocket and poured it down the barrel. The next move was to drop a bullet upon the powder, where the moisture upon it would hold it in place until another shot could be fired. So the instructions ran, but as he made the attempt, Joe began to wonder what sort of rifles those hunters were accustomed to use in running buffalo, for the naked bullet would not play the part expected of it. Forced into the muzzle, there it stuck, and could only be driven home by use of the ramrod—no easy task for a novice while at racing speed.

Luckily the hickory rod was an extra good one, and at length Joe succeeded in sending the lead home, capped his rifle and urged Pet on to deliver the *coup de grace*.

More through luck than skill, the bullet sped true, and Joe was nearly unseated as Pet leaped away to avoid a savage charge by the wounded beast.

Too hard hit to run further, the bull stood at bay, blood running from its nostrils, its eyes glowing red through its hairy mask.

Retreating to a safe distance Joe dismounted and loaded his rifle, then resumed his seat on Pet, riding around to secure a broadside shot. Round and round he rode but only to find that shaggy head fronting him, so busied that he failed to remark the setting of the sun.

At length, impatient and angry, Joe checked Pet, and resting his rifle between the good horse's ears, took deliberate aim and sent a bullet into one bloodshot eye. As the bull's head was lowered, it was impossible for the lead to reach its brain, but, roused by the pain, the animal made a fierce charge. Joe wheeled Pet, but he was not followed. The bull, having literally bled to death, plunged upon its head, dying after a spasmotic struggle or two.

A yell of exultation broke from Joe's lips, but it was cut short as he caught the red gleam in the West where the sun had disappeared. He had no idea of the distance covered during the chase, but he knew that he had been at least half a dozen miles from the Denver trail when the buffaloes were first sighted, and that the chase had carried him still further away.

"It a body could only be sure there wasn't any sneakin' red-skins around I wouldn't mind layin' out all night," muttered Joe. "As it is, reckon we'd better *puckachee*."

He only stopped to cut off the tail of the buffalo to show at camp in support of his story, then leaped upon Pet, and started off in a lopé along the back trail, never once dreaming of going astray.

For nearly an hour he rode on rapidly, holding Pet to what he deemed the right course, though several times he was obliged to bear sharply upon the reins to keep Pet from curving to the right hand.

Suddenly he drew rein. Until that instant he could have sworn that he was riding along the trail left by the buffaloes he had chased, but now, like a revelation, he felt that he was lost on the prairie. It was a curious conversion, but I am relating facts.

Joe alighted, and, by the starlight, searched for a trail. There was none, save that his own horse had just made. Bidding Pet stand, Joe made a wide sweep, first to one side then to the other, but without finding any traces. He knew then that he was lost on the prairie, and for a moment he felt sick and faint at heart, for, boy as he was, Joe knew all that those words implied, thanks to his mountain friends and their frequent talks.

He rushed back to his horse, intending to mount and ride swiftly—*somewhere*; but luckily he did not. In that critical moment he remembered the oft-repeated warning of old Pete Shafer—and he declares that he could almost hear the voice of Pete uttering the words:

"Stop right short an' sit down until ye git cool an' cl'ar-headed. Bar in mind that thar ain't but one way to git out o' the scrape, which is the same road as ye got in. Don't stir a step ontel ye make yourself know you're *lost*. Then—not afore—folly your own trail back. Don't pass over a rod o' ground ontel you're sartin you've read the sign right, even ef you had to crawl on hunkers every foot o' the way, an' don't make one mile in a day. Don't look for anythin' but the trail. Even ef you feel sure you recognize the lay o' the ground ahead, don't try a short cut. It may be a short cut—to your death!"

Joe showed his good sense by acting upon this advice. To make sure that he would take up the right trail in the morning he crept back a few yards along the trail, then thrust his wipin'-stick firmly into the ground, knotting his handkerchief to the rod.

A trifle more at ease now, Joe unblanketed Pet, and leaving the faithful creature free to graze at will, he rolled himself up in the blanket and lay down. It was some time before he fell asleep, tired and jaded though he was. Hungry, thirsty and lost. Three things quite sufficient to banish slumber from the eyelids of any but a young, healthy and growing animal, and at length Joe was snoring, chasing countless buffaloes in his dreams.

How long he slept, Joe never knew. He was awakened by a sharp pain in his shoulder, as though some animal had grasped him and was shaking him severely. With a yell, half of pain, half of anger, Joe struck out fiercely with his free hand, his fist crashing against a bony head so heavily that every knuckle seemed dislocated, then he clutched his rifle and leaped to his feet, only to recognize his assailant. It was none other than Pet, now snortin' and pawin', his ears pricked forward, his eyes glowing, the personification of angry terror.

Half stupefied, Joe could not realize what was in the wind for a moment, but then a chorus of devilish yells and screeches rent the night air.

and several dark figures leaped toward him. Mechanically he attempted to raise his rifle, but it was wrested from his hands, and a brawny Indian made a grasp at his throat.

Pet uttered a wild scream and then his white teeth closed upon the red-skin's shoulder. One fierce shake, and the savage was hurled aside, his arm forever ruined. One fierce plunge among the astonished braves, a few kicks, and they fairly tumbled over each other in their frantic efforts to get out of the way of the mad animal. Then Pet was beside his young master, and Joe leaped upon his back, guided by instinct rather than reason.

With a shrill neigh the noble creature dashed away, but not soon enough to escape the arrows which the yelling red-skins sent after it. One arrow gashed Joe's thigh, but did not remain in the wound, and leaning far over on Pet's neck, he clung to the silken mane as the good horse clove the darkness with wonderful speed.

Joe knew that the Indians were following, for he could hear the *thud-thud* of their mustangs' hoofs, but after the first few moments, he felt little fear of their overtaking him. A more serious danger lay in his being chased so far that his back trail would be obliterated before he could trace it to the Denver trail.

The trampling of pursuing hoofs died away. The occasional yells of the red-skins grew fainter, finally ceasing altogether.

For several minutes more, Joe rode on without any effort to check the speed of his horse. He was without bridle, but that gave the lad no uneasiness. It was rarely that he used the reins to guide his good horse. A pressure of the knees, or a slight leaning to one side being quite sufficient, and Pet was prompt to obey the softest whisper of its loved master. But now, as he spoke, Joe was amazed to find that Pet paid not the slightest attention to his voice. If anything, the racer stretched out longer and ran more swiftly than ever.

Again and again Joe spoke, but in vain. A demon seemed to have taken possession of the usually obedient animal, and no method at the boy's disposal could check its mad career.

Joe grew more and more angry, and leaning far forward, tried to knock the creature down with his fist, but Pet still raced on, never slackening his efforts until he brought up in the center of a camp—the very one which Joe had doubted ever seeing again.

Aroused by the rapid trampling of hoof-strokes, the freighters greeted Joe warmly as he entered the camp, but he was too angry to answer them at first. Leaping to the ground, he snatched up a stick of firewood and aimed a blow at poor Pet. Thank goodness the blow was never dealt.

Old Bob caught the enraged boy's arm, and Pet, reeling, stepped forward with a low neigh, pressing his steaming muzzle to Joe's cheek, then fell heavily over—dead!

Three arrows were buried to their feathers in his flanks. An ordinary horse would never have given a second leap after receiving such wounds, yet noble Pet had carried his master nearly five-and-twenty miles to safety—then died!

Joe dug a grave and buried his faithful friend, planting a headboard above him. Nine years

later that board was renewed by a small stone slab bearing this legend:

"Sacred to the memory of Pet Badger—the truest friend, the bravest comrade, man ever had!"

A foolish display of sentimentality, say you? Then something is wrong with your heart, and I'd rather have one such friend as poor Pet than a million such as you.

Joe—since I have known him, at least—is not one to wear his heart on his sleeve, but while talking of Pet I have seen him break down and turn aside to hide his tears.

He carried that tombstone over four hundred miles to plant it, and I, for one, do not think his time was misspent.

## CHAPTER IV.

### A BOYISH DUEL.

It was a bright and joyous day in more senses than one when Roving Joe returned home, after an absence of some six months. Of course the round trip to Denver, even with bull teams, did not take so long, but from Denver they went to Laramie, then back home.

In all this time Joe's parents had learned nothing of his whereabouts, and when the little sapegrace walked into the room where his mother and sisters were sitting at the supper-table, you can imagine there was a scene.

Instead of being soundly flogged, as he so richly deserved, he was hugged and kissed and treated like one who had risen from the dead. Foolish, but very natural.

From that day Joe set himself up as an autocrat over the Bellemont boys, and some who were both older and larger, who would under ordinary circumstances have stubbornly disputed the palm, meekly subsided when that unlucky Indian was brought forward. For a few weeks Joe was in clover. Whatever he said or proposed was agreed to as a matter of course. One who had "threwed his meat cold" must know better than those who had never performed that glorious feat. Nor, to be simply just, was this altogether Joe's fault. The men, especially a half-breed son of old Joe Robidoux, founder of St. Joseph, made so much of the lad for having raised a scalp of the natural enemy at such an early age, that it was no wonder he was in a fair way of being spoiled.

But already there was a cloud rising above the horizon, and Joe soon learned that all was not smooth sailing. One boy, a recent arrival at Bellemont, never submitted kindly to wear the yoke Joe imposed upon the rest, and one day broke into open rebellion.

"Don't b'lieve ye ever killed a Injun—an' ef ye did, he tumbled down an' broke his neck tryin' to ketch ye!"

So said Bill Sheppard, a tough-looking, chunky lad, not quite as tall as Joe, but considerably heavier; pug nosed and freckled, a miniature edition of a human bulldog in looks and disposition, as far as stubbornness was concerned, though a jolly good fellow in the main.

For a moment Joe was dumfounded, but then he threw aside his hat and rolled up his shirt sleeves. He knew that he must whip this rebel, or else resign his position as "chief." Bill was equally eager for the fray, and at it the two boys went, tooth and toe-nail. There was

little science displayed, but enough determination to make up for that. Blood flowed freely, and loose handfuls of hair floated in the air; but neither one could make the other "holler," and when they were parted by the men, too nearly exhausted to do more than make faces at each other, the question of supremacy was no nearer decided than at first.

The next day they met again, with the same even results and hardly a day passed during the month that did not see Joe and Bill similarly engaged. First one and then the other would gain a slight advantage, but before he was recovered sufficiently to brag over the fact, the account would be balanced by another struggle. Black eyes and bruised faces were chronic. A hard battle every day without the salve of victory to ease the bumps and bruises, then scolding or flogging at home for torn and soiled garments. Lively and exciting enough, no doubt, but beginning to grow somewhat stale and monotonous in the end for those more intimately concerned. So at least Joe began to think, and one day he never left the yard, though from his nest in the hay-mow, he could catch a glimpse of the battle-ground, where sturdy Bill was waiting for the daily struggle.

"Tain't no use talkin'," muttered Joe, his face like a miniature thunder-cloud, painted black and blue and green and yellow, with all the intermediate tinges, by the hard fists of his rival, "this thing's got to end one way or t'other. I can't lick him so he'll stay licked, nor he can't lick me. It's fight him, then come home an' have mother talk to me—if she'd whip, I wouldn't care, and I could stand scoldin', but—"

There was the sharpest sting, for Joe could not hold out against the tears of any one whom he truly loved.

With bound head, he sat there and thought deeply, for how long he never knew.

His first absurd idea was to challenge his rival to fight a regular duel, but a second thought showed him how unfair this would be, for Bill could not hit a barn with either pistol or rifle, unless he first shut himself up inside the building.

"Besides, he's too good a feller to knock over," declared Joe, meaning all he said, too, for there's nothing equal to a close, stubborn fight between boys to make their good qualities known to each other.

It was nearly sun-down when Joe left the hay-mow, and only pausing to assure his mother that he was not going out to fight, ran over to where the boys were playing ball. Bill was at the bat, but as soon as he saw Joe, he began to strip for the delayed battle, as a matter of course.

"Thought ye wasn't comin' fer yer med'cine 'tall, but I've kept it red hot fer ye, Injun-smasher!" he called out, mockingly.

Joe turned white as his many bruises would allow, but made no hostile move.

"I've promised mother I wouldn't fight any more, Bill—"

"Got enough, eh? An' I've jest bin playin' with ye, all along. Lord, boy—I hain't begun to git warmed up, yet. When I do—hooh! a dozen sich Injun-smashers as you be wouldn't make me a smell!"

That tone of lofty contempt was a bitter pill to swallow, but Joe gulped it down, though he had to try twice before he could speak again.

"Don't try to rub it in, Bill. I had to give the promise, because mother was cryin' over it, an' father ain't home to do the lickin' for her; but if you crowd me too hard, a dozen promises won't stop me, an' when we come together after that, either you or me'll lay thar for good when the fight's over."

"Talk's cheap, but it won't buy bread," grunted Bill, but it was clear that both he and the other boys were impressed by the tone in which Roving Joe spoke.

"I promised not to fight any more as we've been doing," Joe continued, his voice more steady now, "but I ain't give up that I'm the boss over you, yet. It don't all lay in the fists. Any boy'll fight, ruther than be called a coward, but it ain't every one that'll walk into danger with his eyes open when there's no way for him to strike back."

"F'ye don't mean business, git out o' the way an' le' me hev my ins," grunted Bill, picking up his bat. "Hurry, up boys; 'most time to go after the cows, an' I ain't struck yet."

Joe felt something rise in his throat and choke him, as he saw how promptly every lad present obeyed Bill, for he knew that they had already deserted the setting star. Then and there he resolved to come off victor in the struggle for leadership, or die.

"Hold on, Bill!" he cried, and tearing the bat from his rival's hands, flung it far away. "If you ain't a coward, meet me in the mornin' at the old swimmin'-hole, an' we'll settle which one is the best man afore we part. Dare yo do it?"

"I dare do anythin' you durst, an' more too!"

Joe turned and ran away home, afraid to trust himself longer. When he was alone he broke down and cried more bitter tears than he had shed since he held the head of dead Pet in his lap before burial.

"The boys think I'm licked, and it'll be all over town afore night. But wait—to-morrow'll tell the tale!"

Bright and early the boys were at the swimming-hole; where there was a long, wide eddy in the Missouri river. All were eager to learn what was coming, and Bill above all the rest. Joe did not keep them long in waiting.

"Bill," and as he spoke he frankly extended his hand, "let's start out fair an' square. You're a heap better fellow than I thought at first. They ain't no use in our being bloody enemies, even if one of us has got to knuckle down to the other. Won't you shake hands?"

"It won't put a stop to what we come here for? We'll fight it out all the same?" asked Bill, doubtfully.

"Unless you take water, yes," was the quiet response, and then their hard, grimy paws met in a sturdy grasp.

"That's hearty!" cried Joe, his eyes sparkling.

"Now, Bill, it's just this. We've fit an' fit, day in an' day out, the best we knowed how, an' we're jest whar we started. I can't lick you so you'll stay licked, nor you can't lick me—"

"I kin try like thunder, anyhow!" grinned bulldog.

"I know that—and leave off no better than you began, too," was the quick retort. "But let that pass. You said last night that you dared do all I dare, and more too. Now, I challenge you to keep your word—to follow me to day, and do just as I do, then, if you are not settled, I'll agree to follow your lead to-morrow. How is it?"

"No runnin' or jumpin' an' climbin'?" hesitated Bill, for he knew that Joe was not to be beaten at any of those exercises by him, nor indeed any of his mates.

"Nothing of the sort. You can do it all standin' or even sittin' down, if you like."

"It's a whack, then! Pitch your jinny, an' I'm after ye!"

"No such rush. Let's have it fair and square before we begin. Which ever one of us takes water first, will own up that the other is chief!"

So it was agreed, and the rest of the boys were witnesses to the agreement.

"Come on, then," cried Joe. "We'll strike the Injun Mound first thing."

This was a noted landmark some two miles north of Bellemont, being a huge mound raised by the Indians, nobody knew how many ages ago, on a high bluff. It had been opened in several places by curiosity-hunters from the East, and large quantities of Indian bones and stone weapons found. It was a favorite resort for the boys, though rattlesnakes and copperheads abounded among the rocks of the bluff proper, for strawberries grew there in profusion, and from the summit the river could be traced for miles and leagues.

Joe kept his own counsel until the rendezvous was reached, though the boys were very curious to learn what was the first test he proposed submitting.

"Plenty o' time—the hull day's afore us," he would say; adding when the foot of the bluff was reached: "Let's have some fun first. Scatter an' hunt for rattle-tails. Bet I kin ketch the one with the most buttons!"

Snakes of nearly every sort were very plenty around Bellemont, and the boys were adepts in the art of catching them. Their method was simple. A long stick was cut with a narrow fork at the small end. When a snake was found it was kept at bay until this fork could be clapped over its neck, holding it helpless. Then a noosed string was slipped over its head and drawn close. This was tied to the pole, and the snakes were brought together and teased until they fought. Sometimes, I regret to say, a fire was kindled and the snakes suspended above the flames to see them writhe and coil around their own bodies in vain efforts to escape the heat.

Indian Mound was truly a snakes' paradise, and in less than ten minutes each boy was busied with a "rattle-tail." Then all went up to the mound proper where the captives were compared, and the largest one, bearing fourteen rattles, was singled out by Joe.

"That rusty old cuss'd make a man sick in a hurry, if it only got a square nip at him, wouldn't it?" laughed Joe, switching the loathsome reptile on the head until it writhed with

impotent fury. "What think, Bill?" and he turned toward his rival with a peculiar smile, not frank and bold, but evidently assumed.

Bill returned the glance in suspicious silence. He was no fool, and he saw that Joe, when his skin was not painted with bruises, was white as a sheet, while his eyes looked unnatural. For a moment he shrunk back as a sickening suspicion struck him. What if—bab! Joe was to set the example, and he was to follow his rival's lead. Joe would not be such a fool—

Joe laughed again, as though he could read Bill's mind.

"That's just exactly what I mean, Bill. We've wasted a hull month fightin' each other. Both can't be chief, an' we won't either give way. They ain't many men would let a pizen critter like that strike him if he could help it. But you've got to do it if you want to be chief!"

"Not afore you do," put in Bill, feeling sure that Joe would not dare make such a desperate venture. "You show the way, an' I'll foller—that's your own offer."

"I know it," was the quiet response, and Joe took several articles from his pocket, placing them on the grass, among them a pint bottle of whisky. "If you follow me, and we both live, then it'll be your turn to lead. I'm goin' to win if I die for it!"

There was something in the lad's demeanor that awed his companions, yet they could not bring themselves to believe he was in earnest. They thought he was trying to "bluff" his rival, and, by making him "take water," thus secure a harmless victory.

They all knew what danger there lay in those gleaming fangs, though the rattlesnake of the West is reputed not as venomous as its Eastern brother. Nevertheless, they all knew of more than one death from rattlesnake bites, and this made them more skeptical as to Joe's resolution.

But they were wrong. Joe has often said since that he must have been part crazy then, for he was determined to conquer Bill if it cost him his life. He had studied it all out that day in the hay-mow, and had set forth duly provided, though he knew that were those fangs to pierce a vein nothing could save his life.

Joe rolled up his shirt sleeve, and motioned Bill to do the same. The latter obeyed, laughing, for he still thought it all a farce.

Joe took the pole and slackened up the string, allowing the angry reptile to throw itself into a coil. Then, his eyes glowing like living coals, he turned to Bill and said:

"Ready, now! Play fair. As soon as it strikes me, put out your arm. Let's start even."

"Pitch your—" began Bill, but cut himself short with a cry of horror as he saw Joe thrust his bare arm almost against the lance-like head of the rattlesnake.

Quick as though the fangs were buried in the white flesh, then drawn back for another blow, but Joe was too swift and jerked his arm back, shouting hoarsely to Bill.

"Do it, or take water!"

Bill shrank away in horror, but Joe followed him up.

"Do it, or own up that you are licked! You

**swo're you'd foller my lead. You saw me take the bite—"**

Bill turned and plunged down the steep side of the Indian Mound, running like one from the plague, and like a flock of frightened sheep, the other lads followed him.

Joe began to feel sick and faint, but knowing how much might depend on prompt action now, he took his knife and cut deeply into the flesh where the fangs had entered, already marked by tiny circles of purple. He tore open one of the packages alluded to, and heaped gunpowder on the wound until no more could rest there, then struck a match and touched it off.

The flesh was seared and blackened, but Joe was too excited to mind the pain, intense though it was, but snatching up the bottle, began drinking the whisky like so much water.

While doing this, he killed all the snakes he could find, then, faint and terribly qualmish, he sat down.

After that, all was a blank until he awoke at home and in bed. The boys had hastened for help, and a party instantly set forth after Joe, finding him dead drunk. It may be added here that that was Joe's first and last drunk.

Whether it was the powder, the bleeding or the whisky, or all combined, Joe never suffered any serious effects from that bite.\*

## CHAPTER V.

### A WILD RIDE.

ROVING JOE'S next noteworthy adventure did not pan out quite so favorably for him.

He was then, is now, and ever will be, passionately fond of hunting, in the American sense of that word, I mean. Until the day in question, all of his shooting had been done with rifle and pistol. To these he had been accustomed ever since he first landed on Kansas soil, and for his age, was a remarkably good shot. But on this day, unfortunately for himself, as after events proved, Joe borrowed a double-barrel, muzzle-loading shot-gun from a neighbor, leaving the weapon he was used to at home.

At that time, and for several years before and after, there was a regular flight of wild pigeons in the spring and fall, migrating north and south, keeping along the high ridges bordering the Missouri river. Nothing like the endless clouds of birds that mark the main flight, but enough to afford tolerable sport, especially as the birds were wont to alight in the cornfields and woods to feed. A favorite stopping place for them was up in the Burr Oak Bottoms, where mast was unusually plenty on the year in question, and in that direction Joe bent his steps, on slaughter bent, for, of course, he then knew nothing of the art of wing-shooting, and meant to deliberately "pot" the birds.

At the outset, Joe was a little dubious concerning the "scatter-gun," or rather his ability

to use it properly, for the weapon itself had earned a wide reputation in the skillful hands of Dr. Crane, who had brought it West with him, and whose wing shots were marvels to the unsophisticated Kansans. But a trial or two at squirrels soon reassured the lad. Each time he secured a rest, taking as close and careful aim as though using the finest hair-sighted rifle, and each time he killed.

That was enough for Joe. He had full confidence in the gun, and would not have shrunk from attacking an elephant with it then.

Twenty odd years ago, deer were tolerably plenty in the timbered ridges of Kansas, though, as a rule, very shy and difficult to outwit. Joe had often set forth in quest of antlered game, but always to return empty-handed. Of course he had heard his old hunter friends talking about the "running season," when old bucks were bold as lions and foolish as a love-stricken swain, though he could never get them to tell why there should be such an alteration in the habits of the usually wary creatures.

It was then the first of November—the very height of the "rutting season," though Joe failed to remember the fact.

He was walking briskly along the ridge, keeping a keen look-out for flying pigeons, to mark them down for slaughter, when he was startled by a peculiar whistling sound coming from only a short distance ahead of him.

Joe stopped short as though suddenly frozen stiff in his tracks, for he knew well what that sound was—the call of a buck. More than once before this had the lad heard similar sounds, only to be followed by the swift *thump-thump* of the coveted game bounding away in rapid flight, with mayhap a fleeting glimpse of a white "flag" as his only consolation, and naturally he expected to hear the same thing now. But it did not follow. Instead, light hoof-strokes drawing nearer, and Joe's heart began to thump against his ribs after a marvelous fashion. Was it possible that he was to be favored by fortune, after all?

Not twenty feet before him was a line of oak bushes, still densely leaved, through which the trail led, but which not the keenest eye of man or beast could penetrate.

Joe dared not move. The slightest sound no doubt would send the buck dashing away. He silently flung forward his gun, thumb on hammers, fearing even to cock them until the game should come into view.

There was not time enough for the "buckager" to fairly take possession of the lad, between that first whistle and the crashing of the buck through the oak bushes, and the instant those branching antlers showed themselves, Joe raised both hammers with a single motion.

The buck was on the fresh trail of a doe, all senses but one unusually obtuse, else it would have scented the presence of danger long ere that sharp click started it.

Even then it only raised its broadly antlered head, staring at the human barrier in its path, instead of instantly wheeling to seek safety in flight.

Joe never stopped to press the gun against his shoulder, but pulled both triggers as the

\* When I first heard this incident, I thought Joe was romancing, but I have since met two of those who were present—one none other than "Bill," and they declare that the foolhardy adventure occurred exactly as it is narrated here.—THE AUTHOR.

weapon came up breast high. As a natural consequence, over he went, backward, his head striking the ground first, but even as he fell he saw the buck rear up and fall over on its back.

Quick as a cat, the lad was upon his feet, and seeing the buck lying among the bushes, its limbs quivering like those of an ox when knocked down by the butcher, he uttered a yell of frantic exultation, and drawing his little hunting knife, leaped astride the fallen animal, grasping one antler and bending over to cut the throat of his prize.

It was a very natural move to make, even for a far more experienced hunter than little Joe, but it proved to be most unfortunate one.

Full in the face the buck had received both charges, and both eyes were literally torn from their sockets, while the heavy shock caused it to fall. But the gun had been loaded with fine bird-shot, powerless as mustard seed to shatter or pierce that bony frontlet, even at such close range. Stone blind, but otherwise unhurt, the instant the buck felt Joe leap upon its back, it flung up its head and floundered to its feet.

One prong of the wide spreading antlers tore the skin from Joe's forehead, its entire width, laying the bone bare. The hot blood rushed down into his eyes and blinded him, while the heavy blow half-stunned and wholly confused him.

By pure instinct he dropped his knife and clasped the buck around its swollen neck, hanging on for dear life, digging his toes into the animal's flank, retaining his place despite the frightful plunges which the terrified creature made. Blinded by blood, knocked half senseless by that heavy blow across the temples, Joe had not sense enough to leap or tumble off before the animal ceased its wild plunging and darted off at breakneck speed. His sole remaining instinct said *hang fast*, and hang on he did with the gripe of death.

Joe could never recall the incidents of that mad ride with anything like clearness; it ever seemed to him like some wild, fantastic nightmare. He believes that the blinded buck tripped and fell headlong more than once, but through it all he clung to the creature, feeling that to lose his hold while under such terrible headway would be death, or broken bones at the least. But it may well be doubted whether he thought or reasoned at all. He hung on through a sort of blind instinct.

Afterward, it seemed hours were consumed in that wild ride, but more probably they were only minutes, though the actual distance between where the race began and where the end came, in a straight line, was found to be all of two miles.

What with the blood from the wound in his forehead, and the blows inflicted by the bushes and brush through which the blinded buck tore, Joe could see nothing, and only by the swift shooting down through empty space did he know that the buck had leaped or fallen over a precipice.

One gasping breath—then a terrible shock that seemed to shatter every bone in his body—afterwards, a merciful blank.

It was nearly sundown when consciousness

returned to unlucky Joe. For sometime he was unable to realize what had happened, or where he was. A dull, heavy pain pervaded his whole body, but as he made a motion to arise, this changed to such exquisite torture that he screamed aloud in agony.

Curiously enough, this pain, instead of rendering him senseless, served to clear the foggiest from the lad's brain, and he remembered everything that had transpired.

He was lying upon the mangled carcass of the buck, whose body had, in a measure, broken the force of the fall, and undoubtedly preserved Joe from instant death.

Forty odd feet above them was the crest of the cliff from which the buck had blindly leaped. They were lying in a small, three-cornered space between high rocks, situated on the steep bluff overlooking the Missouri river.

Cautiously Joe moved his arms. Though sore and bruised he could use them. No bones were broken. Then he strove to arise, but only made the one effort, intense pain causing his brain to reel. He believed both legs were broken. At this terrible fear he gave way.

It was day again when Joe remembers aught more of that unlucky adventure. Of the past night he could tell nothing. He may have been out of his head, or possibly the hours were passed in a swoon. All he knows is that he awoke to a sense of keen hunger, while only a dull throbbing in his lower limbs reminded him of his crippled condition.

His hunting knife was gone, but he had an old "barlow" in his pocket, which he managed to get at, though every motion that in the least disturbed his lower limbs drew groans of agony from his lips and started the beads of cold sweat out upon his face.

This was not the first time that Joe had eaten his breakfast raw, and he now appeased his hunger without any serious qualms. Had he been given water, he would have felt comparatively at ease, so long as he made no move that could disturb his lower limbs.

Twice that day, Joe made desperate efforts to leave his stone prison, but each time he was conquered by that terrible pain. It would have been no easy task for a perfectly sound lad to leave that curious prison, formed of three huge, square rocks, wedged close together and inclosing a triangular space some ten feet from corner to corner.

Once outside, even if unable to drag himself to safety, Joe knew that he could start and keep a fire going, the smoke from which, arising in that desolate spot, would sooner or later attract the attention of those whom he felt sure must even then be out searching for him.

There was one unlucky fact which he now recalled, and which caused him great uneasiness. On leaving home, he had intended to go south, and so told his mother, only altering his mind and going north, toward Burr Oak Bottom, after leaving town. As a matter of course, when night came and passed without his return, and his mother's fears were awakened, search would be made for him among the ridges in an exactly opposite direction from where he now lay helpless. Only for this, Joe could have rested comparatively easy, assured of being found and rescued in due course of time. But now—he

had no means of knowing how badly he was hurt; might he not die before he was stumbled upon by chance?

In after-days, it was no easy task to get Joe to dwell upon those hours. He owns that, at times he must have gone mad with mingled pain and fear, screaming and yelling until he sunk into a stupor, worn out, body and mind.

Once he must have been heard by men on a flatboat, passing by, for when they landed at St. Joseph, they spoke of the strange sounds they heard, and the morning papers had brief accounts of the affair, the superstitious flatboat men attributing the weird sounds to something more than mortal.

The second day and night passed. Then, near noon, Joe was roused from a stupor by the excited yelping of a dog high above him, and looking up, his joy may be imagined when he recognized a black and white head—the head of his good squirrel dog, Trader—craning over the edge of the cliff. One wild cry—then he knew no more.

The story of his finding may be briefly narrated.

Serious alarm was not felt on his account until the morning after his departure. Then his mother gave the alarm, and as Joe, ever since he earned his spurs by killing an Indian in open fight before his thirteenth birthday, had become a general favorite, all the village turned out to search for him. As he had feared, their whole attention was directed to the densely wooded ranges and valleys to the south of town, thanks to what he had told his mother, and an entire day was lost. Men, women and boys were engaged in the hunt, and as a consequence, no one going to bring up the cows, several of them staid out all night. Next morning, Bill Sheppard, greatly to his disgust, was sent after a missing cow, and in hunting for her, stumbled over the shot-gun Joe had went hunting with.

Quick as his legs would carry him, Bill ran to Bellemont with his prize, and hardly stopping to tell his mother, caught the rope of the school-house bell and set it to ringing like mad. The alarm soon caused the searchers to return, and then Bill told his story. Quick as his short legs could cover the ground he led the way to where the gun was found, and then the trail was ciphered out.

Carefully it was followed, for a mistake might ruin all, though few then present hoped or believed they would find more than Roving Joe's corpse when the end was reached.

Little attention was paid to old Trader, for he had never been known to follow the trail of any game larger than a squirrel or a rabbit, yet after all, the noble old fellow was the one of them all to make the discovery.

Joe was tenderly lifted out of what had almost proved his tomb, and forming a litter of boughs, they bore him home. A surgeon from St. Joseph was brought in hot haste, and not until he came was it known how seriously the lad was injured.

His left leg was broken, his right hip dislocated, two ribs fractured, besides many bruises from head to foot. That winter was a dreary and cheerless one to Joe, but when spring came he was up and around, lively and harum-scarum as ever.

## CHAPTER VI. AQUATIC EXPLOITS.

AMONG the brightest of Roving Joe's youthful reminiscences, or at least those which he seems to take the most pride and pleasure in dwelling upon are his feats in the water, and I don't know as I can do better than to crowd a few of them into this chapter, though some transpired before and some a good while after the adventure last detailed.

Until Joe struck Kansas soil he was essentially a "house boy," very much preferring home company to that to be found on the streets, and though he had lived until ten years of age on the bank of the Mississippi river, he had not yet learned to swim. In the new country where he soon found himself, all this was changed. Everything was to be learned over again, and Joe proved himself an apt scholar, as has been shown in the preceding pages.

The "swimming hole" in the Missouri was admirably suited for the purpose. The river made a deep indentation on the Kansas side, some three hundred yards long and thirty yards wide at the center, where stood a huge rock projecting into the water, shaded by a spreading white elm. This rock was nearly twenty feet high, and at all times there was a comfortable swimming depth of water around its base, though occasionally the "June rise" would entirely cover the top. The current of the river ran from point to point of the indentation, leaving all within a gentle eddy. The bottom was firm and smooth. A better "swimming hole" could hardly have been shaped to order.

Joe's first lesson in swimming was a rude but effectual one. He was watching the boys, envying them their fun, but afraid to venture in, when one of the older lads, Ike Tampkin by name, caught and pitched him headlong from the end of the rock in fifteen-foot water.

"Swim or drown, ye little varmint!" he shouted as Joe, spitting and sputtering, rose to the surface.

Of course he would have hastened to pull Joe out if he saw him in trouble, but Joe was too badly scared to reason. Believing that it was indeed swim or drown, he *did* swim. And within that same hour the little rascal was leaping off of the rock and swimming ashore with the best of his comrades. That one lesson was all he needed.

Within a month from making his first stroke Joe performed another of his "cool tricks," to use his own words.

He and another lad—who bore the rather peculiar name of Buenos Ayres—was in swimming together, and, as was frequently the case, they soon got to seeing which would dare venture furthest away from shore into the rapid current.

On this day, neither was willing to give in first, and they swam on side by side, each hoping that the other would yield at the next stroke. At length, Buenos cast a backward glance, and with a startled cry, turned to swim back. Not until that moment did either of the lads suspect how far they had left the Kansas shore behind them.

Joe looked back, then forward. He was sur Missouri than Kansas, and so he struck

out with renewed vigor, never pausing, though his muscles ached in every fiber and his wind was almost gone when he "let down" and touched bottom. Not until he waded out and dropped breathlessly upon the sunwarmed sandbar, did Joe remember that he would have to swim the river again, if he hoped to reach home. This was an unpleasant fact that never occurred to him when he struck out for the nearest land, fearing that he could not last back to the Kansas shore.

However, by walking up the river a mile or more, Joe succeeded in crossing in safety. After that, hardly a day passed but what he swam the river at least once over and back.

On the Missouri side lived a number of Frenchmen, who raised "garden-truck" and fruit for the St. Joseph market. One of these men got the boys awfully down on him, and, boy-like, they formed a league against him and his. From that day, the poor fellow had little peace. A score of boys of all ages and sizes, black yellow and white, would swim the river, storm his orchard and garden, then retreat to the water or sand ridges and eat confusion to their enemy. More than once they were driven off in confusion, chased by the irate gardener and his dogs, sometimes even with gun. But it was little use. The boys would flee to and floundered through a "slough" of soft mud, neck deep, and then, from behind a sand ridge, mock and taunt their enemy.

Not very moral, I admit, but very boy-like.

On one of these occasions, Joe saved his first life. His sole comrade, Buenos Ayres, was shot at and hit by the angry Frenchmen, just as they plunged into the water. When half across the injured leg gave out, but Joe managed to tow his mate safely ashore.

That fall, Joe and Buenos caught a rude, clumsy canoe adrift—a small cottonwood log hewn out and pointed at each end. It was a very primitive affair, and dreadfully prone to upset, but the boys thought it a marvel of grace and beauty, and before Winter came, Joe could handle it remarkably well.

Early one morning he was starting out to cross the river in this, to his wild-goose blind, when he saw two men floating down the river, clinging to a small log. They shouted for help, and though the ice was running heavily, Joe struck out in his canoe. The craft was not large enough to contain three, and even with one boy and a man for freight, it required skillful handling to avoid accidents, but Joe proved equal to the task, and brought one after the other safely to land. They proved to be two hunters, who had upset among the floating ice, twenty miles up the river. Their skiff filled and sunk, and only the knowledge that they were nearing a village enabled them to hold out as long as they did.

At that day, before railroads drove them out of business, the Upper Missouri was thronged with steamboats. Owing to the location of Bellemont, boats could be seen coming up the river, soon after leaving St. Joseph, and when coming down, more than twenty miles away.

A favorite sport of the boys was to "ride the waves," and during the swimming season, whenever a down or up boat was sighted, word was passed and a rush made for the swimming-hole.

On one occasion, this sport was well-nigh turned into a tragedy, and, as usual, Joe was in the scrape.

Two boats were racing up the river, and, when they drew near the swimming-hole, were nearly abreast each other. All of the boys were in the water yelling, screaming, diving and tumbling like porpoises. Joe and Bill Shepard—now as firm friends and cronies as before they had been rivals—were furthest out, hooting and chaffing the deck hands as the boats came on. These, mostly negroes, began throwing chips and sticks of wood at the lads, all in good humor, though some of the missiles were heavy enough to be dangerous, and so well aimed that both lads were forced to dive almost continually.

In their excitement they did not remember that at this point the channel made an abrupt curve toward the Kansas shore, and they failed to notice the warning cry of captain and pilots until the prow of the nearest boat was upon them.

In terror the lads sought to swim away out of danger, but the huge wheel made such a terrible suction that the effort was worse than vain. Joe had barely time to scream:

"Dive, Bill—dive deep!"

Down Joe went, kicking and striking out for dear life, only stopping when his head butted against the river's bottom. The noise of the paddle-wheel above him sounded like thunder, and the whirling waters seemed about to tear him limb from limb, so violently was he tossed about. But when he arose, the danger was past and the boats more than a hundred yards away, their sterns crowded by excited passengers, who cheered loudly as Joe waved his hand and shouted at them.

Then he turned to look for Bill just as that luckless youngster was whirled past him on a huge wave. A strangling cry came back, and as Bill sunk Joe knew that he had been hurt somehow. Shouting to his mates for help, he swam forward and dove. More through providence than judgment he struck Bill and brought him to the surface helpless, dying as the lad thought.

Bill was a heavy load, and little Joe was tired, so it may be guessed that he looked abxiously enough for his mates. To his horror they had not understood his cry, and were all swimming for, or had already reached shore. He screamed for help in tones that could not be mistaken, and instantly his friends turned to his aid.

Both Bill and Joe were rescued, though they both had to be dove after. They were found so firmly locked together that their gripe could not be broken until land was reached.

Bill had been struck by the paddle-wheel and three of his ribs broken. He recovered in due time.

The next life Joe saved was at a camp on the Smoky Hill river several years after the incident just recorded.

An emigrant train had camped there, checked by the swollen river, their bank full, a muddy torrent. The men were all absent hunting. Several children had started out to fish, when one, a little boy, fell from his perch and was swept down past camp, striking against and

clinging to the extreme point of a pile of driftwood protruding from the further bank.

Joe was alone, on horseback, and hearing the wailing of women rode to the spot. At a glance he saw that any hesitation would be fatal, for already the boy was almost worn out. Perhaps it was well that Joe had no time for counting the risk. As it was he galloped up the bank to the projecting point from which the lad had fallen, kicked off his boots, dropped weapons and ammunition, then plunged into the water. There was no need of swimming, for the current swept him straight to where the boy clung, and it was an easy task to snatch the lad up with one arm as the current bore him past. The hard work was still to come, and for one brief spell Joe thought that his time had surely come. But life was sweet, and he fought on, finally reaching the bank nearly a mile below.

The mother was there to meet him, and almost smothered Joe with kisses before he could break away. Extremely fearful, Joe ran to his horse, snatching up but not stopping to put on his things, he leaped upon his horse and fled like a coward.

The most desperate struggle Joe ever had in the water, occurred in 1867, while he was a student in Bryant's Business College, at St. Joseph. Directly beneath the Lover's Leap, on Prospect Hill, the Missouri river there formed a huge eddy, which was a favorite resort after dark for those who wanted a good swim.

One evening, Joe with a number of students, visited the spot. A fine swimmer, Joe had been playing far out in the water for nearly an hour, and growing satisfied he returned to land. Before he reached it, he heard some one calling for help, and outlined against the lights in Ellwood, he distinguished a human head and wildly gesticulating arms. At first he thought it was all in sport, as so many persons foolishly try to frighten their mates, but the moment he landed, he knew by the tones that this was not the case now.

"Come, boys, there's some one drowning out yonder!" he cried, and leaped back into the water, without waiting to see the result of his appeal.

A very few moments carried him to the man, who was still wildly beating the water, turning round and round, fairly insane with fright, and almost gone. Joe made a grasp for the man's back hair, trying to keep beyond reach of his arms, but failed. Instantly he was caught around the neck, one hand fastening with a death-gripe upon his throat, while the drowning man's legs also twined about him.

Joe had then nearly attained his growth, was almost six feet high, strong beyond the ordinary run, quick and supple as a panther; but now he was literally helpless, and with that terrible death-gripe upon his throat, he felt himself sinking down—down—stopping only when the bottom of the river was struck. All the while he was fighting as only a man can who is fighting for his life, and as the bottom was reached, he managed to free his legs. Just how it was done he never could explain, but by some means he doubled himself up until his feet were against his antagonist's breast, then he threw all his strength into one effort, and kicked the

man away. It seemed his entire windpipe and throat were torn out when that death-gripe was broken, and as he shot up to the surface, he was so nearly exhausted that he struck out for shore.

Here he found his comrades all buddled together in the flatboat moored there, dressing themselves, some calling for a boat, but not one with coolness or manhood enough to lend a hand to save a fellow being from death.

Hard words, but richly deserved as one more fact shows.

Joe reached the edge of the flatboat, and as he grasped it, he heard the man who had so nearly drowned him in that terrible struggle, once more splashing in the water.

"Throw me an oar!" Joe gasped, but not one offered to do so, and it is a shameful fact that he was obliged to climb into the boat, throw overboard a heavy sweep unaided, then swim alone once more to the rescue.

He was in time, and guiding the failing man's hand to the oar, which he grasped frantically, Joe towed him ashore.

His name was Thompson, a printer employed in the office of the St. Joseph *Daily Herald*.

Besides these, Joe saved in 1865, a man from drowning in the Missouri, at Jefferson City, named Stevens, a cattle-buyer, who fell into the river when drunk; in '68 he rescued a man named Clark, at Kansas City, Mo.

These were all the human lives he saved from the water, but there was one more incident which I cannot refrain from narrating, as it is strongly characteristic of Roving Joe.

One fall while shooting ducks at Lake Contrary, a few miles below the city of St. Joseph, Joe shot an enormous hawk, which, with only a wing broken, fell into the bayou, a deep, narrow arm of the lake among the lily-pads.

With Joe was his dog, Carlo, a good retriever, and a great favorite with his master. Carlo at once jumped into the water after the bird. Joe called to him, but Carlo saw the struggling hawk, and would not return without it. The bird fought desperately, striking out with beak and claws, and for a time foiled all efforts to seize it, on the dog's part. Resolved not to be beaten, Carlo dove and grasped the hawk from below. One bite, and the bird was dead, and with it in his mouth, Carlo turned toward shore. But his legs were tangled in the slimy stems of the lily-pads, and the more he struggled the worse it grew.

Joe saw that his dog would drown without help, and though the wind was sharp, the water cold and a skim of ice forming upon it, he quickly stripped and plunged in to the rescue, knife in hand. A few quick strokes set the dog free, but while so doing, Joe himself became entangled, and in reaching down to cut himself free, he lost his knife. Fiercely he struggled, but for some minutes in vain. The ice-cold water was rapidly sapping his strength, and he began to lose hope, when he finally tore himself loose. It was only by aid of faithful Carlo, who had not deserted him, that Joe succeeded in reaching land; and he has often said that he would do the same thing over to save a dog of his from such a death.

Roving Joe, it may be added, takes pride in knowing that, though he has more than once been forced to shed blood in self-defense, he has

saved many more lives than he has taken, so far as the human race is concerned.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A REMARKABLE ESCAPE.

THE Missouri river is no easy one to freeze over, owing to its peculiarly erratic current, here to-day and there to-morrow, its violent "boils" and "suckholes," the fear being accomplished by floating ice becoming gorged, to be cemented together by continued cold weather.

As will be seen, this process was not especially favorable to the smoothness so desirable for pleasant skating, but the winter of 1861 and '2 was a remarkable exception to the general rule. It is possible that an ice gorge formed far down the river, though Roving Joe does not remember, but certain it is that from below St. Joseph to many miles above, the Missouri was frozen over, smooth as glass, without fluw or hummock, remaining thus until spring. The ice was clear as crystal, and even when it reached a thickness of more than a yard, the water could be seen flowing beneath, and even tiny bubbles followed with the eye for yards. Truly, a glorious skating rink, half a mile wide and leagues in length. And you may be sure that the boys made good use of the opportunity afforded.

Joe was particularly fond of the sport, though he could never master the finer details of the art, performing as a general thing by "main strength and awkwardness," but after all, he managed to extract quite as much fun out of the business for himself as his erratic didoes afforded his more skilled comrades.

On New Year's night, the young folks of Bellement and vicinity agreed to collect and have a sort of carnival on the river. The evening was a lovely one, clear and cold, the stars and moon shining brilliantly, affording an abundance of light, but notwithstanding this, nearly every one of the company had arranged some sort of light or lantern, protected against the wind, and secured somewhere on their person. When the sport was once fairly begun, the scene was a pleasing and animated one indeed.

No one was enjoying the carnival more hugely than Roving Joe, when as usual, he "put his foot in it."

A brief explanation must be given for a full understanding of what ensued.

The ice crop was of such an excellent quality that an enormous amount was harvested that winter, and a considerable quantity was reaped by some of the village people.

As a matter of course, though no ice had been cut that day, the holes left by the iceman, while quickly skimming over, were not yet covered with a crust strong enough to bear up any sort of weight, and to guard against accidents on this occasion, wooden railings had been set up around the openings, hung at each corner with lanterns, as danger signals. With all these precautions, it would seem that an accident of the sort that followed, was impossible, but when there was a chance for getting into a scrape, Roving Joe was a genius that defied impossibilities.

He was alone, all his mind and energies given to skating backward, which accomplishment he was determined to master or "bust somethin'"—and he did burst something!

When under full "stern-way," Joe struck one of the frail railings, and as it gave way, he realized his peril. One wild yell—he had time for no more—and he crashed backward through the inch of ice, sinking into the water right where the main current flowed.

That yell was heard by all, and some of the skaters were quick enough to catch a glimpse of Joe ere he disappeared through the ice, while all saw the lanterns knocked down and rolling over the ice, telling only too plainly what had occurred.

Instantly all was confusion. Girls screamed with horror, and boys rushed toward the spot, though not one of them expected to ever lay eyes upon the luckless wretch again, alive or dead. None knew who the lad was in that moment of alarm and confusion. This added to their horror, for it might be a relative.

Then, what was little short of a miracle transpired.

A human head and arms shot up through the ice, some yards below the broken railing—a short, gurgling cry was heard—then the dark form sunk down almost to the level of the ice.

An instantaneous rush was made around the railings, and Joe—for he it was—was grasped and pulled out of his icy bath, frozen stiff and unconscious.

As quickly as possible he was borne to land, and into the nearest house, where his frozen clothes were removed and restoratives successfully applied.

It was not until the next day that the full nature of Joe's marvelous escapade was understood.

He had fallen into one hole left by the ice-cutters, sinking down deep into the water, then shooting up with such force that he broke through the inch-thick ice on another opening, having passed beneath a bridge of solid ice, forty-two feet in width, by actual measure!

All this was done by the action of the current alone, and Joe never claimed any credit. Heated when he fell into the water, he was almost instantly deprived of his senses. His cry and flinging out of his arms when he came to the surface, were purely mechanical. Had he risen a yard further down-stream, it would have been only to strike the thick ice and be swept away to death. The current swept him against the square cut edge, and his outflung arms struck upon the flat surface before him, his clothes and thick mittens instantly freezing fast. Only for that, the current would have sucked him down before aid could reach him, promptly as his companions acted.

All things taken into consideration, I do not believe there is a more remarkable escape on record.

On one other occasion Roving Joe came near finding the fishes of the Missouri river with his precious carcass. This was in the spring of 1864.

For a month or more, Joe had been living with an uncle, then farming in Missouri, some fifteen miles out from St. Joseph, beyond the Platte river, in a region locally known as "the huckle."

artial law had just been lifted from that portion of the State, and as no hunting had been done for nearly three years, game was unusually plenty and tame. As soon as Joe received word of this fact, he took his rifle and rode over to have a glorious time—and have it he did, too.

The end came too soon for his liking, but when word was brought by a neighbor, who had been in to market, that the ice in the river was on the point of breaking up, Joe at once mounted and set out for home, as his parents were intending to remove to Jefferson City by the first down boat.

Joe shot what game he met along the road, and when he entered town, he and his horse were half covered over with wild turkeys, ruffed grouse, squirrels and rabbits. The day was very warm, and fearing to delay even an hour, Joe rode down to the river. The ice was broken at the edge, for several feet out, but he urged his horse in, and succeeded in scrambling upon the firm ice beyond.

Just then he heard an angry shout, and looking back Joe saw a policeman running out of a saloon and shaking a club at him. It seems that the city authorities had pronounced the crossing unsafe, and this fellow had been stationed at the river to prevent any person attempting to make the passage. As it happened, he was in the saloon for a drink, and so Joe gave him the slip. All this Joe learned afterward.

Like the general run of country lads, Joe had a holy horror of policemen, and not knowing but what he might have unwittingly broken the law in some shape or form, instead of pausing or turning back, he urged his horse on at greater speed. He could not distinguish the warning words of the policeman, else he might have turned back, but he soon saw that he was in a bad box.

All at once the rotten ice gave way beneath his horse, and the snorting creature sunk half-way up its side. Joe tried to leap off, but was so incumbered with his heavy rifle and load of game, that before he could do so, the horse by a desperate struggle, scrambled up on the firmer ice.

Joe was ready enough to turn back then, but it was too late. That fierce plunging had shattered the ice behind them for yard, and the cracks were rapidly growing wider. There was only one chance—to press right on—and that a forlorn one.

Joe's good horse seemed to realize this fact as well as its master, for it pressed ahead, trembling in every muscle, its nose held close to the quivering, water-covered ice.

A score or two yards further and again the rotten ice gave way, this time above the shallow place where a sand-bar had formed some two feet below the surface. Here the courage of the horse failed it, and with firmly planted feet it refused to move either forward or backward. Joe kicked and lashed, but in vain. He was nearly distracted himself, for from up the river came a sullen, roaring sound that could not be mistaken by one who had lived on its banks for so long.

The ice was breaking up, and woe be to those caught in its course when the shattered mass came down.

Joe tore off his coat and flung it over the trembling animal's head, blinding it completely. Then, using his knife for a spur, he forced the terrified creature on, the ice sinking beneath him at every step, the cracks widening behind them, the water growing deeper upon the ice as the advanced.

Forty feet from the Kansas shore there was no ice, and quite a swift current running. Joe knew the water was deep here, but less than half a mile up the river he could see a ten-foot wall of tumbling, crashing ice, and knew that the plunge must be made.

Made it was, and proved successful, but Joe had hardly reached land when that grandly terrible wall of ice rushed past his position. One minute later would have meant death.

Joe was the last one to cross on the ice that season!

## CHAPTER VIII.

### CAPTURING A HORSE-THIEF.

LIKE all other border States, Kansas has had its epidemics of horse-stealing, with all the usual "trimmings." Perhaps, taking into consideration the number of inhabitants, the scourge was worse before Kansas was admitted into the Union than ever since. Hardly a day, certainly not a week, would pass without queries being made by armed men in quest of stolen stock, and on more than one occasion while hunting, nutting, berry-picking or looking after the cows, the boys of Bellemont had their blood chilled by the discovery of a ghastly corpse hanging from some lonely tree in the woods, bearing the significant notice of Judge Lynch on breast.

Roving Joe's first introduction to this peculiar phase of border life will never be forgotten.

In coming to the new country, Mr. Badger brought an extensive assortment of stoves and hardware, having built store and dwelling beneath one roof, a large, two-story frame building, the family living up-stairs and to the rear of the "store."

Of course the sleeping rooms were all above stairs, and Joe slept directly above the front door. Before the building was a plank platform, and a stout sign, one end being bolted to the sill of the window in Joe's room.

Late one night he was awakened by the sound of excited voices and trampling feet without, and as he started up in bed, heard the sign-board creak.

With visions of robbers dancing before his eyes, he leaped out of bed, and taking one hurried peep out of the window, ran to awaken his father and uncle.

A horse-thief had been caught in the act, and was even then being hung by means of a lariat flung over the sign!

The wretch was kicking and swaying at the end of the rope, when the two men flung up the window and promptly cut the lariat, before any of those below could realize their purpose.

There was yelling and cursing and fierce threats when the half-strangled thief dropped to the platform. One or two shots were fired, but both Joe's father and uncle had smelt burnt

powder before, and half-dressing, they descended and confronted the angry mob.

It was risky work for some few minutes, and at one time it seemed as though the two brave men would ornament their own sign, but unflinchingly they pleaded the cause of law and humanity, gradually gaining converts until the crisis was past.

Joe does not remember how that horse-thief was finally disposed of, but he knows that he was not hung then and there, nor by that crowd.

One day along in the summer of 1859, Joe, with his mates, were down at the "old swimming-hole," as usual, when they were treated to a scene from a tragedy such as one seldom witnesses.

The swimming-hole itself has already been described. At an ordinary stage of the water, there was a narrow strip of sand laid bare at the water's edge. Above this rose four or five sand clay ledges forming a regular series of steps, each about two feet high and six broad. Then came a stony bank, of six feet, where the water never reached, fringed with elder bushes. Along this ran a road, only wide enough here and there for teams to pass each other, and then rose the steep, rock-strewn and brush-covered ridge for near a hundred feet, broken at that height by a regular rock ledge of more than a dozen feet in thickness. Above this was another level, along which ran a road, then the hill sloped back more gradually.

All at once the boys were startled by hoarse shouts, pistol-shots and the rapid clattering of horses' hoofs, coming from the upper level. As a matter of course, all eyes were turned in that direction, and right speedily they were rewarded by a most extraordinary spectacle. A horseman checked his frothing steed upon the rock-ledge, and turning in the saddle, fired several shots in swift succession at his as yet hidden pursuers. Return shots were given, and the boys, even at that distance, noticed the man's right arm drop as if broken. Then—with a ringing yell of defiance, the desperate fellow leaped his horse from the rock-ledge, down the hillside, at this point an angle of at least sixty degrees.

It was a frightful sight—a desperate venture that would have ended in death ninety and nine times out of a hundred. But the fugitive lay back until his long hair mingled with the tail of his horse, both brushing the ground as the snorting creature with forelegs extended, slid and scrambled down the steep, reaching the road in safety, but carried over and beyond it by their impetus.

The boys scattered with yells of affright as this reckless avalanche came crashing over the bank, and from the ledge above, nearly a score of horsemen mingled yells of rage with exclamations of wonder and even admiration at the reckless daring displayed by the fugitive.

Only for a moment, however. Though none among them dared take the leap on horseback, they dismounted and plunged down the hill on foot, to cut the fugitive off before he could recover himself and regain the lower road.

Not until half buried in the edge of the river could the horse check itself, and then, as the rider glanced back, he saw that to turn back

and attempt gaining the river road would be fatal to his hopes of escape. Already the enemy were half-way down the hill, weapons drawn for use.

With a defiant shout, and a mocking gesture with his left hand—the other hung broken at his side—he urged his horse straight out through the eddy and into the swift current.

This he entered, but there the mad race ended. His relentless pursuers opened fire with their revolvers, and both horse and rider sunk beneath the blood-tinged waters. Neither rose to the surface in life, and if ever, it must have been miles below.

This man would have been a hero, were he not a horse-thief. Joe will never forget that thrilling scene, when John Bickerstaff, horse-thief and murderer, met his death.

Of the many interesting yarns which I have heard Joe spin concerning the "horse-dealers" of that day, one more must suffice.

On that occasion Joe played a more prominent part than in those just recorded, and though in all fairness, no one can blame him for acting as he did, to this day he deeply regrets his share in the tragedy. But to the story.

On the day in question, Bellemont was greatly excited. Word came of a series of unusually daring horse-thefts, ending in two farmers being killed, and a hot chase instituted. One of the criminals had been traced to the vicinity of Indian Mound, and there all signs ended. Bellemont was warned to keep a close look-out for a man of the description given, and if discovered, to arrest him, dead or alive.

Of course Joe was bound to hear all the news, and he was thinking over the reports that evening when he went up in the haymow to throw down hay for the horse and cows. At the very first thrust of the pitchfork he made an amazing discovery. The outside tine penetrated human flesh instead of hay alone, and so firmly was the steel held that it was with difficulty Joe plucked it forth. As he did so, some hay clung to the fork, and by the dim light Joe recognized one white hand of a man, the fingers just closing themselves into a tightly clinched fist. Besides this, not a motion, not a sound came from the owner of that hand.

Confidentially, Roving Joe admits that he was too badly frightened by the discovery to make an outcry, but at the time he meekly accepted all the praises that were bestowed upon his coolness and nerve as then displayed.

Quietly he flung down hay for the stock, and even whistled as he did so—possibly to keep his courage up, for he firmly believed that this man hidden under the hay was the famous horse-thief whom the Vigilantes had lost trail of near the Indian Mound, Joe Morey, whom rumor credited with at least a score of brutal murders. No doubt he had entered the haymow on the preceding night, and was only waiting until darkness came again to ride away on Queen, the successor to Pet.

Joe left the haymow and hustled around below for a few moments, then stole silently away to the store, only a few yards distant, where he quickly made known his discovery. Ten minutes later the bidden man was pounced upon and taken prisoner. He denied being Joe Mo-

rey or any other horse-thief, but that was a matter of course, and as Bellemont boasted neither calaboose nor jail, he was bound, placed in a wagon and taken to Wathena, several miles south, where he was identified by one of the relatives of the murdered farmer as Joe Morey. He was secured for the night in a room of one of the hotels, but before midnight a mob arose, and overpowering his guard, dragged him forth and strung him up to a sign post.

But Joe Morey was not to die just then, nor there, for the law and order party, anticipating some such move, had prepared to foil any attempt at lynching. There was a brisk fight over the horse-thief, but it ended in his being rescued and once more placed under guard.

Through it all he displayed the utmost coolness and remarkable nerve, as one little sentence from his lips will serve to prove.

The night was cold and frosty. When the first bell rung Morey arose and took a glance out of the window from whence was visible the sign to which he had been strung up, then walked to the little looking-glass and began combing his long black hair. He noticed a silver thread or two, and carefully plucked them out, then nodded to his reflection with a short laugh, saying:

"Your pow'd look frostier than that, old boy, if you had hung out there all night!"

He was taken down-stairs and given breakfast, eating heartily, laughing and chaffing his guards between mouthfuls, seemingly wholly at ease and the last man on earth to perform the desperate feat he did a short time later.

Quick as thought he knocked his two guards over backward, striking out right and left at the same time, then cleared the table along which near a score of armed men were seated, leaping head-first through a window, carrying the sash with him.

Early that morning Joe started to escort his eldest sister to visit some friends residing at Palermo, a village some distance south of Wathena, and they were riding past the hotel when the horse-thief broke through the window. At first glance Joe failed to recognize the fugitive, but as the yelling, cursing guards came through the window in hot pursuit, followed by the other men by way of the door, he realized the facts of the case. Boy-like, he was for joining in the chase, but his sister restrained him, and Joe was glad enough afterward that such was the case.

Quickly recovering himself, Morey shook off the window sash, then darted away, running as only a man can who knows that recapture means death.

Back of the hotel the ground was level, unoccupied by either buildings or fences, covered with a growth of old grass and weeds. A quarter of a mile beyond was a cornfield, uncut, with a high "snake-fence" of rails, "staked and double-ridered." Beyond this lay the woods, heavy timber, dense brush, where a man could easily elude his pursuers or find secure hiding.

Toward this haven of refuge the desperate fugitive ran like a deer but hot on his trail were two score men quite as desperate as he, firing their revolvers at every leap.

One of the guards, a tall, athletic, middle-aged fellow, was nearest the fugitive, in fact

not more than a dozen paces separated them. Twice around he snapped his revolver, but as often the caps failed to explode. Then, with a snarling curse he flung the weapon with all his force at Morey.

Struck fairly between the shoulders, the horse-thief fell forward upon his outstretched hands, but recovering quickly as a cat, he raced on even faster than before.

The guard snatched up his revolver and repeated the action, with the same result. Three distinct times did he knock Morey down thus, but each time the active horse-thief was up and away before his pursuer could grasp him.

In stooping for his pistol the third time, the guard tripped and fell at full length. When he arose, Morey had reached the fence of the cornfield, and was climbing over it. But there fortune deserted him entirely.

The guard cocked his pistol and fired—the cap exploding after having failed twice.

His spine injured, the fugitive fell back, helpless, but scowling defiance at his foes as they flocked around him.

The almost incredible truth was soon made known. Besides that last shot, twelve bullets had struck his body and limbs. In addition, blood was flowing from the bruises left by the revolver blows, and running from where Joe's pitchfork had penetrated his arm. An after inspection of the trail showed that he had been hit by the very first shots fired, yet he ran a full quarter of a mile, literally shot to pieces.

Were this incident related in a novel, it would be laughed at as absurdly improbable, yet it occurred precisely as told here, and can readily be substantiated.

Despite his sister's remonstrances, Roving Joe was a witness of the closing scenes.

The dying man was carried into the edge of the woods, where a noosed rope was flung over a limb above him.

"Make a full confession—tell who your mates are, and where they may be found—confess who murdered Brown and Appleby—reveal all the signs, passwords and hiding places of the accused league to which you belong, or—"

The speaker shook the noose significantly, the action being far more impressive than words. But the dying man only laughed—a faint, husky sound, but full of scornful defiance. Horse-thief, perhaps murderer, though he was, a braver man than Joe Morey never drew the breath of life.

"Refuse, and we will hang you," was the stern addition. "Speak out, and if your words are proven true, you may go free."

Again that mocking laugh, this time followed by words:

"You lie when you say that, and you know it as well as I do. If you were to set me free, after this, those devils would hang you! But even if you could keep your pledge, still I would laugh at and refuse you. Turn me free! You have shot me all to pieces! Even if I lived, it would only be as a helpless cripple, and death is better than such a fate. Kill me—hang, burn, do as you please—only kill me—and that in a hurry, or I'll cheat your rope yet, by dying of my own accord!"

Exhausted by the energy with which he had spoken, Morey closed his eyes, and never a word

more could they extract from his lips. If he held the secrets of the great league of horse-thieves which undoubtedly existed in Kansas at that day, he carried them to the grave with him.

To their eternal shame be it said, the dying man was tortured in order to make him confess, but all their efforts were in vain, and then, seeing that he was indeed dying, they fitted the noose around his throat and drew him up into the air.

So died one of the most celebrated horse-thieves of his day, and despite his profession, despite his crimes, Roving Joe declares that he died more of a *man* than the best among his executioners.

### CHAPTER IX.

#### TURNED ADRIFT ON THE PRAIRIE.

For two or three years after his first actual experience of prairie life, Roving Joe managed to content himself after a fashion around home, in obedience to his mother's entreaties. Not that the fever was killed or even smothered, for a perfect cure of the "prairie fever" has seldom if ever been recorded. But Joe was the male "head of the family," now, his father being chief-clerk in the Quartermaster Department at Jefferson City, Mo., at that time, and until 1863, he kept his longings well within bonds. But he was growing older and more self-willed all the time, and for fear of losing him entirely, a sort of compromise was entered into. Joe was permitted to roam at will, only promising to report at home at least once in every three months in person, and by letter as much oftener as possible.

Joe asked no better terms, and his leave-taking was very brief. Rifle, revolver, knife and ammunition; a spare blanket, besides the one which served him as saddle; a quart canteen; a light knapsack containing a spare shirt and socks, matches, pepper and salt—such was his outfit.

Queen, the successor to Pet, was a beautiful bay mare, which had won quite a reputation down South during the days immediately preceding the war, as a race-horse. She was captured by the 7th Kansas, and sent home to Joe as a gift by his brother-in-law, Captain Weston. Beautiful, fleet and intelligent though Queen was, and dearly as Joe learned to love her, she could never entirely fill the place left by the death of noble old Pet.

For weeks at a stretch without seeing a human face, white or red, Joe lived a bustling yet idle life that spring, summer and fall, with only Queen for companion and friend. Whenever night overtook them, there was their home. Through the day Joe shot enough game to give him supper and breakfast. Meat and water was all he required then and now; for bread and vegetables he cared nothing—even at this day he will go for weeks without tasting either, living entirely on beef steak, the

result, probably, of the tastes and habits formed in the days of which I am now writing.

A pleasanter eight months than those consumed in the roving life hinted at above, Joe declares he never spent. Through it all he was not ill a moment, had not one unpleasant adventure, met with no mishap or misfortune until the cold frosts of the early November nights warned him that he must return home and see to putting matters in shape for winter. Then the delicious charm was broken, and Roving Joe had another unpleasant adventure to note down in his mental log.

Joe had camped for the night on the north bank of the Rattlesnake creek, and had just finished roasting a fat, prairie chicken for his breakfast, when two white men pressed through the bushes and greeted him. They were the first human beings whom Joe had laid eyes on for over two months, and as may be expected, he gave them a warm welcome, especially as he recognized one as having often stopped over in Bellemont, during the summer days when fur was not worth the trouble and danger of taking. The other fellow was an entire stranger.

The account they gave of themselves was brief and probably true enough. They were on their way to the trapping-grounds, and had spent the night on the same stream, only a short distance below Joe's camp. Up at daylight, they espied the smoke ascending from his camp-fire, and leaving their horses *cached*, they stole forward on foot to investigate. They had not yet breakfasted, and as Joe had an abundance of game, he cooked while they ate.

Queen was standing close by, and naturally enough the conversation turned on her merits, Denbre, the trapper known to Joe, joining in the praises bestowed by the latter.

The other fellow seemed greatly struck by her beauty, and bantered Joe to trade, hastening off after his horse, although the lad laughed at the idea of parting with Queen. He did not entertain the slightest notion of foul play being intended, placing full confidence in Denbre.

The other trapper quickly returned with both horses, two tolerably fair mustangs, but not to be spoken of in the same breath as Queen. So Joe said, bluntly enough, and though the fellow talked glibly enough, his words made not the slightest impression. At length he grew so urgent that Joe, more to escape being bored by his extravagant lies concerning his mustang, bridled and blanketed his mare, then leaped upon her back and bade his guest good-day.

Roving Joe had not ridden a dozen yards, when he was startled by the sharp click as of a rifle being cocked, and turning his head, saw that the unknown trapper had him covered with leveled rifle. So much he saw, but be-

fore he could speak or make another move, the weapon exploded and he fell from his horse.

When his consciousness returned, Joe found himself lying in the water, a few rods below where he had camped. No doubt the assassin, believing him dead, flung him into the creek to hide the evidence of his crime, but instead of boring Joe's brain, the bullet, owing probably to his turning round at the moment of the discharge, had only torn through the scalp, making a painful flesh wound, but not entering or even fracturing the skull. The current had swept Joe round the bend, then lodged him against a pile of driftwood in shallow water.

Joe crawled forth, feeling faint and sick enough for the first hour or so, but indignation aided him to recover his strength. A close inspection resulted in finding his rifle, broken at the grip by a blow against a tree, and with the lock lost. Queen was gone, no doubt ridden away by the would-be murderer.

Joe found his knife still in its sheath, but his revolver was gone, either taken by the robbers, or else lost out when he was pitched into the creek.

Two hundred miles from any settlement that he knew of, Joe was anything but happy, and his face was wet with something besides the water which dripped from his long hair.

But this did not last long. Hot, deadly rage came instead, and the boy swore to follow the trail of those who had so bitterly wronged him, even if it should lead to his own death.

As a forlorn hope, he cut some hickory splints and after a rude fashion bound on the stock of his rifle. His ammunition was all right, and where game was so plenty, he could secure enough to keep him from starving by making snares, in case he could hit upon no plan of discharging his rifle.

For a lad of his age, Joe was a good trailer, and found little difficulty in tracking his enemies. They had made no effort to conceal their trail, no doubt feeling sure that he was dead, if not by lead, then by water, and the three horses cut a plain swath through the dry prairie grass.

Eager to make up lost time, Joe followed the trail at a steady dog-trot, keeping a keen look-out ahead. The chances were a thousand to one against his ever overtaking his enemies, but Joe was too angry to stop to reason thus, most luckily, as the sequel proved, for that one lone chance turned up in his favor.

Near the middle of the afternoon, Joe, who had not paused once since taking the trail, caught the faint sound of rifle shots far ahead of him, and then, from the crest of a prairie swell, he caught a glimpse of a fleeing herd of buffaloes, chased by at least two horsemen. The distance was too great for him to decide

whether these were white men or Indians, and as the hunt was some distance to the left of the direction in which his trail led, he doggedly followed the latter until near sunset, when he found where his enemies had deviated from a straight course, no doubt for the purpose of killing buffalo.

At this the lad's hopes grew brighter. It was rather early in the season for professional trappers to get to work, and he knew that it was frequently the case they spent a few days *en route* in killing and jerking meat. If this should prove to be the case now, he would have time enough, and doubtless a chance to recover his stolen mare, if not to take summary vengeance on his would-be murderer.

As after events proved, this was exactly what the two trappers intended doing. They had killed three buffaloes, and went into camp that night on the open, bare prairie near where their game had fallen.

Joe skulked around the greater portion of that night, but there was a clear sky and a full moon; there was hardly cover enough near the camp to shelter a snake; the horses were tethered close to the little camp-fire, and even he was not foolish enough to court almost certain death in attempting to recover Queen.

To the north, little more than a mile distant, was a narrow line of timber marking a water-course, and knowing that the trappers would not wait for the slow process of curing their meat by the sun, when fuel was handy. Joe stole away to the timber as the moon sunk low.

From here he closely watched the enemy, and knew that he had reasoned aright when he saw them after breakfast, cutting up their game and loading it on their horses.

This done, they struck the creek only a few hundred yards below where Joe was in hiding, and one man began cutting the meat into suitable strips, while the other arranged the rude frame-work on which the meat was to be jerked, or cured.

The timber was filled with thick brush, and as the trappers did not suspect the presence of any enemy, Joe had little difficulty in keeping concealed where he could watch their operations. A far greater trial was to keep his hungry stomach in subjection, especially when the scent of the warming meat was carried to his nostrils by the favoring breeze. But Joe was wise enough to know that there are still greater evils than an empty stomach. Right or wrong, he believed he would be killed without mercy were he discovered by the thieves. Still, if he had his revolver, or even if his rifle was in good condition, there is little doubt but Joe, boy though he was, would have opened fire on the scoundrels without waiting for the coming of night, urged on by hunger.

Once that day Joe narrowly escaped dis-

covery. Denbre while in quest of dry wood to replenish the low fires under the meat came to the very clump of brush and briars beneath which the lad lay curled up, and grasping a dead branch, dragged it away, leaving Joe almost wholly uncovered. Most fortunately the fellow did not look behind him, the brush and brambles in his path requiring all his attention, and so the lad escaped, seeking another covert where there were no tempting sticks.

That was a terribly long day, but the end came at last, and as the shadows deepened in the timber, Joe stole cautiously around to where he could inspect the horses. These, as night fell, had been brought in and tied close together, a quantity of green cottonwood tops being placed before them as forage.

With a coolness worthy an older head, Joe waited for the proper time before making a decisive move, knowing that he would never be given another chance should he fail now, even if his life did not pay the forfeit.

Queen was so well trained that Joe knew she would not make a sound after his warning whisper met her ears, but he was suspicious of the two mustangs, and took care to keep well to windward of them. Should they scent the presence of a stranger, they would almost certainly awaken the suspicions of their masters.

Joe knew something of the way in which meat was jerked, and knew that one of the men must keep awake to watch the fires, to keep them at exactly the right stage, neither too brisk nor too low. And not a little to his satisfaction he saw that the rascal who tried to murder him was to keep the first watch. Until then, he had only thought of recovering Queen, but now he resolved to return shot for shot.

Resting his rifle in a stout crotch, he covered the rascal's left breast, and then struck the cap on the nipple a sharp blow with the handle of his knife. A wild cry followed the shot, and as Joe leaped up, he saw the trapper fall, Denbre leaped up from his sleep, amazed and terrified, then, as Joe yelled like a demon, the fellow plunged for cover.

Joe leaped to the horses, and cutting them loose, sprung upon Queen and dashed away over the prairie, followed by the two mustangs in full stampede.

Roving Joe left a long trail behind him that night, and in the morning secured the two mustangs, taking them home to Bellemont with him, where, after his story was told, the animals were sold for his benefit.

Neither of the trappers ever returned to Bellemont, and it was years later when Joe learned that, owing to the manner in which he had to explode his rifle, his lead had only broken the fellow's left arm. But it was fatal that they two were to meet once more in life.

## CHAPTER X.

### A DISAGREEABLE PREDICAMENT.

In the spring of 1864, the Badger family sold out their property in Bellemont, leaving that place for good. For two years and over, Roving Joe's father had been at Jefferson City, head clerk in the Quartermaster Department, as his official title read, but owing to the fact that the Quartermaster, Captain G—— (since dead, so the name is left blank) was almost entirely uneducated, Mr. Badger was in reality the head of the huge concern. Owing to this fact, his furloughs were few and far between, and as, in the early days of '64, people began to believe the war would not end for ages, he sent for his family, and Joe was taken into the office, doing the work of a common clerk, though without salary or having his name on the pay-rolls. I mention this to show that *all* employees did not try their utmost to skin the government.

The change from "running round loose" to daily work at the desk, was far from satisfactory to Joe, as those who may have read this far will readily understand. But he was now sixteen years old, and if he was going to become a reputable citizen, it was high time he was laying the foundation.

Still, Joe was given frequent holidays, and these were spent in hunting and fishing, rendered doubly enticing by the strong element of uncertainty and danger hanging over all those who ventured far away from earthworks and soldiers.

There were not many pitched battles, where the forces engaged were numerous enough to demand a place in history, fought on Missouri soil during the war, but for all that, few States were "livelier" or more "full of fun," thanks to the guerrillas of Quantrell, Todd, Anderson, Gregg and others scarcely less notorious on the opposing side: Jim Lane, Peavick, Jennison, et al. The old feuds, begun long before the war, between Missouri and Kansas, were fought out to the bitter end during the war, and not a day passed but what some more or less terrible tragedy occurred. At different times, Independence, Kansas City and even the State capitol itself, were hastily called to arms to beat back the audacious guerrillas, and during the darkest days of '64, he who entered the wooded hills beyond the fortifications, did so at the risk of his life.

So much by way of preface, to an adventure which came very near putting an end to the exploits of Roving Joe.

During those days, even after martial law was lifted, in the fall of '63, four-legged and feathered game was very little hunted in Missouri, and flourished accordingly. Natural enough, when the hunter knew that each shot he fired might bring down upon his back a gang of bloodthirsty guerrillas or a scarcely

less to be feared squad of soldiers out on a scout. It was war to the hilt in those days, and when a suspected person was captured by either party, rope or bullet saved the trouble of guard duty or questioning.

Roving Joe was just rash and conceited enough to enjoy the situation, and lest worst should come of refusal, he was given permission to take a week's hunt along the Osage river. As yet he had made no intimate friends among the youngsters of Jefferson City, for Joe was ever backward in that respect, so he made no effort to secure company on this hunt, feeling safer with only his own hide to look after.

For a day or two Joe was in clover, after striking the Osage. Game was abundant and tame. Wild turkeys, squirrels and rabbits, with an occasional summer duck for change. Once in awhile a deer could be jumped, or caught feeding by moonlight in the few cultivated fields, but Joe did not waste much time on them. For precaution sake, he had selected a rifle carrying an exceedingly small ball, requiring but a pinch of powder, and making a report scarcely louder than the explosion of a cap on a shot-gun, though deadly enough on all small game under one hundred yards. Knowing that the report could scarcely be heard by ears a hundred yards away, Joe soon grew entirely at ease, and enjoyed his furlough amazingly.

Not until the third day out did anything unpleasant occur. Joe fired at a gray squirrel, and like an echo, only much louder, came the report of another rifle, the lead from which fairly barked the lad's left ear in its passage.

This was a close call, and Joe darted behind the nearest cover, reloading his rifle as rapidly as possible, while keeping a keen eye upon the clump of brush above which hung the blue smoke of burnt powder.

For nearly an hour Joe lay in waiting, but not a sound came from the direction of the ambush; and then he slowly backed away until he could creep around the spot from whence the treacherous shot had been sped. It was an easy matter to read "sign" on the thick carpet of decaying leaves, and Joe soon found where his unknown enemy had beaten a cautious retreat, no doubt soon after the failure of his shot. For several hundred yards Joe followed the trail, satisfying himself that there had only been one man engaged in the dirty business, then gave over the hunt, satisfied to let well enough alone. Who the bushwhacker was he never learned.

The lesson was not forgotten, though, and was emphasized by the discovery, an hour or so later, when Joe returned to camp, that his horse was missing—stolen beyond a doubt, since he had been left haltered, while now saddle and bridle as well had disappeared.

In selecting his head-quarters, Joe had an eye to comfort rather than prudence, taking possession of an old log house and stable. The family once owning it had been butchered by bushwhackers a year or more before, though the stains of blood were still visible on the rude puncheon floor.

There was only one room in the house, a few boards being laid loosely across the smoky rafters, forming a small loft under the leaky roof. The fireplace and chimney were in good order, and so Joe, having scant fear of ghosts, took possession of the building for the time being.

The nearly fatal shot and the theft of his horse gave Roving Joe plenty of food for thought, and though he was too stubborn to flee from an unseen danger, he concluded to roost high that night, climbing up into the loft and replacing the boards, so there would be no danger of his falling through in his sleep.

As fate would have it, there was little danger of this occurring, for Joe did not get a wink of sleep that night.

He was fortunate in retiring so early, for in less than an hour he heard footsteps prowling around the building, and after a brief pause the door slowly swung open.

Only naturally acute hearing, sharpened by a sense of imminent personal danger, could have caught any further sound for several minutes, but Joe knew that at least one human being was cautiously creeping around the room beneath him. Then came a curse, and a rough voice called out:

"Come in boys—they ain't no one here!"

Others entered, the door was closed, and a fire was kindled. By its red gleams Joe could distinguish four men, all heavily armed, with cutthroat written plainly upon every face.

It goes without saying, that Joe was very careful not to kick around much in his bed that night, for every word of his ugly guests below but strengthened his belief that they were guerrillas or bushwhackers. Indeed, before long, he heard them admit as much; that they were old members of Quantrell's gang.

They sat for hours before the fire, playing cards, and talking over their bloody exploits of the past. There was nothing said about the shot fired at Joe, or of his horse, so he concluded that they had been concerned in neither affair.

They took their departure before daylight, and be sure Joe did not call them back to ask if they had forgotten anything, or invite them to call again.

Through that long night Joe did a big amount of thinking, and more than once mentally vowed that if he was not discovered by the bushwhackers, he would make a straight trail for town and safety in the morning. But

when day came, and he was once more free to descend, this decision was modified.

Joe was only a boy, and not as wise as he might be. When he spoke of taking a hunt on the Osage, he was laughed at by his fellow-clerks, and even when they saw him ready to set out, they predicted his return, scared out of a year's growth, long before his week's furlough expired. And recalling this, Joe did what almost any high-spirited lad would have done—made up his mind to see the week out even if he had to crawl into a hollow tree and stay there until the time expired.

But he had a more comfortable refuge than that in his mind's eye, discovered while fishing in the Osage. This was a cave on the river bank, level with the water, and which could not be entered except by wading. It was some forty feet deep, the entrance being wider and higher than the inside dimensions. This and owing to its location near a well known ford, made it about the last spot one would suspect of being used as a hiding-place, and for that very reason Joe resolved to make use of it, at least for the remainder of the week, and depend for food mainly on the fish he could catch from the river.

At the rear end of the hole, Joe dug out a comfortable berth in the sand, lining it with leaves and grass, choosing a little ledge several feet above the level of the bottom. This he occupied that night, but was fated to sleep very little.

He had scarcely fallen into a doze, when he was awakened by the sound of fire-arms, distant yells and shouts. Scrambling out of his berth, he ran to the entrance of the cave and listened.

The alarm came from the other side of the river, and as he listened breathlessly, he knew that the sounds were coming nearer, for now he could catch an occasional hoof-stroke, the iron ringing out against the rocky road leading to the ford.

The night was a lovely one, the sky without a cloud, the stars and full moon shining brilliantly. The Osage, quite broad and shallow at this point, shone like a band of silver. But Joe did not dwell long upon the beauties of nature, for just then four men ran down the slope on the further bank, and dashed into the shallow stream, making the water fly in silver spray. And before they had gained the middle of the stream, a number of horsemen dashed into view and opened a lively fire upon the fugitives.

Joe saw this much—and more. As though despairing of making their escape by flight, on foot, where horsemen were following hard, the fugitives veered to the right, heading straight for the cave.

Joe dodged back and retreated to his sand berth, hastily tearing out the dry leaves and

grass lest it should betray him by rustling beneath his weight. It was a forlorn hope, but the best he could do. In that bright moonlight, with the reflecting water all before the cave, not even a rat could have left it without being discovered by either the fugitives or pursuers, if not both. And in those days blows were dealt in preference to questions—all men were deemed guilty until they were proved innocent.

Straight to the cave floundered the fugitives, and then turning at bay, opened a swift and deadly fire upon their pursuers, now not far from the middle of the river. Under cover, revealed only by the red gleams of their revolver shots, the four men were more than a match for the score who pursued them, and when two of their number fell dead, and others were wounded, the horsemen scattered, some making for our bank, and to cut off the retreat of the enemy, some turning back.

Taunting yells followed them, and Joe felt his heart sink as he recognized the voices of the four men who had been his unwelcome guests on the night last past. Then he bitterly regretted not having acted on his first impulse when he saw the fugitives head for the cave. That was to fire a shot or two toward them, warning them to choose some other course. This he doubtless would have done, if the real facts had been known to him, but in those days, and in that portion of Missouri, he knew that the "boys in blue," unfortunately, were obliged to play the part of fugitives oftener than otherwise. This may sound ungenerous, but the records of guerrilla warfare in Missouri will bear out the assertion.

Unluckily Joe had little leisure for bewailing his mistake.

The soldiers who had crossed the river, kindled a huge fire directly above the cave, and their comrades on the other side, guided by it, opened a brisk fire, sending almost every bullet into the wide mouth of the cave. The very first one sent a little shower of sand down into Joe's face.

The luckless lad was thus threatened by a double peril. If he tried to alter his exposed position, he would attract the attention of the bushwhackers, and almost certainly be murdered, while if he remained still, the very next musket ball might prove his death. Truly, however looked at, it was a most unpleasant dilemma, and for the life of him, Joe could not decide which horn was the bluntest!

Steadily the bullets poured into the cave, and then Joe saw one of the outlaws stagger up and fall, stone dead. An instant later, a second gave a wild scream of agony as a bullet tore away his entire lower jaw!

The survivors seemed panic-stricken by the sudden and awful fate which had overtaken their comrades, and pressed closer against the

side of the cave. But still the whistling minie balls came over the river and into the wide-mouthed cave, searching out every nook and cranny as though instinct with reason and thirsting for human blood.

As may be imagined, Joe was in a terrible sweat, probably worse frightened than he had ever been before, and as the vicious lead continued to *thud-thud* into the sand around him, he slipped out of his berth and crouched down in a side niche, where he was better protected.

Scarcely had he done so, when the two outlaws, driven out from their nest by the searching bullets, came creeping further back into the cave. While the darkness covered him, Joe could see them quite distinctly against the lighter background, and knowing that he would almost certainly be discovered, he rose up, a heavy stone in one hand, his rifle in the other. With all his force, he hurled the stone, striking one man full in the face and dropping him senseless; then, before the other fellow could realize what had occurred, the clubbed rifle descended upon his skull with deadly weight. Without a groan he fell beneath the blow, and then Joe raised his voice, strengthened by fear, calling out that they surrendered —to stop the shooting.

## CHAPTER XI.

### SENTENCED TO BE HUNG.

THERE was a moment's silence, then a voice from above:

"Throw down your weapons and come out —hands up!"

*Zip—zip* came a minie ball from over the river, striking the water a few yards outside the cave entrance, then glancing up and flattening against a point of rock, sending little stinging splinters of lead into Joe's face.

"Stop that infernal firing over there, then," he yelled, unwilling to make himself a more conspicuous target for the sharp-shooters. "I'm a friend, and an honest man!"

"*Honest h—l!*" the lad heard, but for all that, a signal was made by the soldiers on the bank above the cave, and after one or two straggling shots, the fusilade ceased.

"Crawl out of your hole, down there," came the same voice that had answered Joe's hail. "Follow your nose with hands up until I cry halt. At the first crooked move you'll be filled full of lead. Forward, march!"

Joe would rather have argued the case a little, before facing the music, but he did not dare hesitate now, knowing that were firing to begin again he would almost certainly fall a victim. So forth he marched in obedience to orders, all quivering "goose-flesh" as he expected nothing less than to receive a riddling volley of bullets.

"Halt!" came the stern command, when Joe

stood fairly revealed in the shallow, moon-lit water. "Where's the rest of the gang?"

"Two are dead, and I knocked the other two senseless. I happened to be in there when they took cover—"

"Right wheel—keep your hands up and come ashore," interrupted the voice, and as Joe turned, he saw that he was covered by half-a-dozen leveled muskets.

Gingerly enough he stepped, lest a stumble over the smooth pebbles be deemed an attempt at escape, and a search-warrant be issued from those ugly muzzles. Then his arms were grasped by two stout boys in blue, and he was led up the bank, to be closely questioned by the sergeant who appeared to be in command of the party.

As briefly as possible Joe told his story, and had the satisfaction of seeing that not one word he uttered was believed. It *did* sound rather fishy, from their stand-point, that a boy should choose to go hunting alone, in a time and place where a company of soldiers, armed and mounted, could not feel certain of passing in safety.

The sergeant, when Joe repeated his statement concerning the disposal of the four outlaws, said:

"I'm going in after them. If you have lied, so much the worse for you. Boys, string him up at the first sound of treachery below!"

Joe shivered a little at these words, though he was standing so close to the hot fire that he could almost smell his flesh roasting. Ten minutes at least had elapsed since he left the cave. What if either or both of the outlaws knocked down by him had recovered their senses sufficiently to make even the faintest fight for life? Death, surely. He could see that plainly enough imprinted upon those rugged, bronzed faces.

What a glad bound his heart gave when he saw the sergeant and his escort return, dragging the four bodies rudely by the arms! At last the danger was over!

Right there Joe made a mistake.

With the perfectly natural desire to make everything clear, he was eagerly giving his story to the sergeant more in detail, when the fellow over whose thick skull he had shattered the stock of his rifle, recovered his senses and lay listening to the rapidly speaking lad. He knew that his own doom was sealed beyond all hope, and when he learned what he owed to Roving Joe, he resolved to be avenged on the one who had led to his being taken alive.

With devilish cunning he feigned insensibility until Joe was through, then suddenly raised his body to a sitting posture, despite the rope that bound his arms, staring about him with an air of bewilderment. But this gave place to a stare of well simulated astonishment as his eyes rested upon Joe, unconfined, then

## Roving Joe.

shanging swiftly to a scowl of hatred and suspicion.

The keen-eyed sergeant was watching him, and the exact effect counted on by the malignant rascal was produced.

"You look as though you knew this young gentleman," he said, quietly, but at the same time moving within arm's-length of unlucky Joe.

The outlaw was no fool. He saw this seemingly careless movement, and read it aright. Some men in their eagerness for revenge would have overdone the matter, but not so this cunning scoundrel. His ugly face instantly became a blank, and he slowly shook his head. But the seed of suspicion was planted, as he knew full well.

"I'm glad of that," said the sergeant. "I did suspect him of being one of your gang, seeing he was in the hole with you, and thought he had betrayed you in hopes of saving his own neck."

"It wasn't *you* that knocked me over, Jesse?" fiercely demanded the outlaw, scowling at Joe, who was too greatly astounded at the question and the name, to reply at once.

"You *do* know him, then?" quickly demanded the sergeant.

"Say you didn't do it, Jesse, or—"

"I'm not Jesse anybody, and I only knocked you down to save my own life," spluttered Joe, excitedly.

"That settles it! Put the nippers onto him, boss, or he'll play the devil with you all yet. He has broken the oath first, or I'd never squeal. *That's Jesse James!*"

Even at that early day the simple names of Frank and Jesse James were a terror to all Unionists. Joe stood aghast, unable to believe his ears, but the sergeant and half a dozen men pounced upon him, throwing him down and binding him with ropes enough to hold a giant helpless.

The lying outlaw laughed with grim delight, and knowing that his own doom was sealed beyond all hope, seemed resolved on completing his revenge without delay.

"It's the rope for us all, I s'pose, sergeant?"

"D—n you, yes!" was the growling response. "You've killed four of our men to-night, to say nothing of your other crimes. I only wish you each one had a thousand necks to stretch!"

"Only fer me, that cunnin' cuss 'd 'a' fooled ye this time, jest as he's done so often afore. I'd never let on, ef he hedn't squealed fust. Ef I tell ye why we run into sech a open kiver as that hole, will ye grant me a favor?"

"That depends. Speak out," was the short response.

"Waal, to git even with *him*, I will. A gang of twenty more o' our boys was to meet us thar by daybreak—"

"That cave was the rendezvous?"

"Yes. We thought we could hold out ontel they come, but them bullets weakened Jess, an' he sold us out. All I ax is this: *hang him fust*. I don't keer how soon I folier, but I would like to see him take the fust dance on nothin'!"

Exhausted by his furious struggle and dum founded by the terrible charge brought against him, Joe had been unable to speak until now. As he saw the soldiers rigging up the ropes each scouting party went provided with at that time, he broke out into a fierce denial of the accusation. But he might as well have tried to whistle down a hurricane. He was jerked to his feet and a noose was fitted round his neck. Another minute and he would have been launched into eternity, but just then one of the soldiers cried out:

"The major's comin'—he wasn't killed, after all!"

Several horsemen were just entering the river at the ford, and as the keen-eyed soldier had recognized the real commander of the squad, the sergeant suspended the execution, and Joe felt his hope faintly reviving.

The major, followed by the sharp-shooters from the other bank, rode across, and the sergeant briefly reported.

It seems that the officer had gone down before the first shots fired by the outlaws, and leaving a few men to look after him, the sergeant pressed the pursuit.

Joe eagerly repeated his story, the one-armed major listening to him coldly, then turning to hear what the two outlaws had to say. While he was thus engaged, Joe, with a vague remembrance of having met the officer somewhere, not far distant in the past, eyed him keenly, vigorously racking his brain, but all in vain, until the man on whom his sole hope of life rested, turned from the outlaw to the sergeant, saying:

"String them up, Morgan. We can't be bothered with them, for if their rascally fellows come to keep the rendezvous, we must rake them all in. Hang that rascal first," pointing his one hand, the left, at poor Joe.

Not a little to his and the soldiers amazement, Joe burst into a laugh—not of insanity, but of heartfelt joy.

"One moment, Major Dale, unless you are anxious to commit murder on an innocent boy. I can prove to you, by your own lips, that I am what I claim to be—a lover of the Union and a clerk in the Quartermaster office at Jefferson."

The major seemed impressed by Joe's earnestness, and drawing forth his watch opened it and said:

"I give you five minutes. Go on—prove your words."

"Less will do, unless your memory fails you," said Joe, confidently. "On the 10th of

this month, you were in the office of the chief clerk, at Jefferson, signing your name to some vouchers. You, Mr. Badger, the head clerk, and a subordinate were the only persons in the room. You stood at the subordinate's desk, signing, when you dropped your pen. You stooped quickly to recover it—so did the clerk, at the same moment, and your heads bumped together, your hat falling off. The clerk handed you both hat and pen—you thanked him—"

"That's sufficient—I know you now!" cried the major, with his own hand removing the noose from Joe's neck. "I apologize for the unjust treatment you have been—"

Joe cut him short, feeling too happy to listen further.

The two outlaws were hung, cut down when dead and cast into the bushes, while the soldiers removed all traces that might alarm the enemy they expected, then went into ambush. But they waited in vain, and when they rode back to town that day, Joe bore them company, satisfied that the hunting on the Osage was not good enough to pay for the wear and tear on one's feelings!

## CHAPTER XII.

### A MIDNIGHT RACE.

THE winter of 1865, was the first of three similar seasons which Roving Joe spent trapping, for the most part on the head-waters of the Republican and its tributaries. The first season was spent with only two companions, old Sabe Sollars, an experienced trapper, Harry Cornell, a dashing young cowboy, but who was rather flighty and subject at times to sudden and unaccountable fits of cowardice, for, as a general rule, he was a regular dare-devil.

Late in December, old Sabe having discovered fresh signs of Indians near their trapping lines, the three men were out looking after their traps, keeping all together and taking the lines in detail, instead of each one attending to his own. This was a degree of caution both Roving Joe and Harry were reluctant to fall in with, but that very day their scruples were satisfied.

All unexpectedly, in breaking through a plum thicket, they came face to face with at least a dozen Sioux. It would be no easy task to say which party was the most surprised, but the red-skins scattered and fired a volley, fortunately so hastily that not a single bullet took effect.

"Back to kiver, boys, an' lay low!" yelled old Sabe, his rifle sounding the death-knell of the nearest red-skin.

The next instant the tr<sup>s</sup> were under cover.

The patch of plum brush was small, not covering more than a square rod, but unusually

dense and low. In this the trappers lay, each guarding one third, while the Sioux, fully appreciating the excellence of the cover, retreated in hot haste to shelter themselves. Still it was clear that they had not yet abandoned all hopes of lifting three scalps.

It was not much after sunrise when the first shot was fired, and as the skirmishing continued until near the middle of the afternoon, it would be tedious to dwell on the affair at length. To be brief, considerable ammunition was wasted on both sides. Old Sabe was slightly cut on one shoulder, Harry was "barked" in two places, while Joe, strange enough for that usually unlucky fellow, escaped without a scratch. On the other side, two more Indians were killed that our friends were positive of. Harry shot one, while leaping from one bunch of grass to another, and Joe, taking a snap shot at a puff of smoke, had the grim satisfaction of seeing a red-skin leap up, blood streaming from a hole between and just above his eyes.

After that shot, nothing more was seen or heard of the enemy, and after waiting a couple of hours, old Sabe stole forth on a scout that resulted in a most agreeable discovery. The red-skins no doubt concluding that they would get more kicks than half-pence, figuratively speaking, had beaten a retreat bearing their dead with them.

Old Sabe, with the wisdom born of experience, wanted to pack up traps and seek a healthier locality, believing that the Sioux would return with reinforcements, but Harry and Roving Joe were highly elated by their easy victory, and overruled him, declaring that they wanted no better sport than to whip out the entire Sioux tribe!

So the rounds were completed, traps reset and baited, the animals taken lugged back to camp, there to be skinned at their leisure.

Our friends had not yet settled in a regular head-quarters, waiting for colder weather. Their camp was a simple half-shed, fully open in front, where a good fire was generally kept burning. Until now it had not been deemed necessary to keep regular guard through the night, but after the events of that day this duty was of course to be performed, the watch being divided into three portions. Joe stood the first, then Harry, who was to awaken old Sabe at two o'clock.

For a perfect understanding of what follows the location of the camp must be described.

It was pitched on a narrow peninsula, or rather cape, the rear and both flanks being guarded by a small stream, the banks of which were about four feet high. This was now covered over with a skin of ice probably an inch thick, of course not strong enough to bear up the weight of a man. A small cottonwood tree had been felled across this, the branches rudely

trimmed off, the trunk serving well enough as a foot-bridge.

The fire was suffered to die down, and Joe's watch came to an end without any event worthy of note. He roused Harry, who went on guard with his double-barreled shot-gun, heavily charged with buckshot, twelve in each barrel.

Roving Joe almost immediately fell asleep, and knew nothing more until he was awakened by a tremendous double report, one blending with the other, and heard Harry yell:

"Injuns—Injuns—a thousand of 'em!"

The cowboy, yelling this, plunged over his startled mates, bolting his way through the brush back of the camp, yelling "Injuns" at every leap.

Such a panic is more contagious than the small-pox, and without stopping to catch up their rifles, both Joe and old Sabe followed Harry through the same hole.

The trees threw a black shadow over the creek and foot-log, though the moon was shining clearly, and under ordinary circumstances none of the party would have dared attempt crossing on that slender, smooth-barked log without carefully feeling the way, but Harry was too badly frightened to lose a moment, and started to run across. His foot slipped when near the middle of the stream, and falling, his trowsers somehow caught on the stub of a limb, and there he hung, yelling for all that was out.

Roving Joe outran Sabe, and reaching the log, straddled it to "coo" over, for fear of falling. Alas! one foot struck Harry, who grasped it like grim death, causing Joe to topple over and crash through the ice, the shock tearing Harry's nether garments almost entirely off.

They each was half-crazed with fright, and grappling, they struggled fiercely, smashing the ice and sending the water flying in every direction. Their strangling yells in the darkness, added to old Sabe's fright, and he scuffed over the log, running away, yelling that awful alarm at every leap.

The boys heard it, and tearing themselves loose, floundered ashore, setting off after Sabe Sollars with the speed of frightened turkeys.

A more utter panic, a wilder flight than that was never placed on record. First one and then the other of the two boys would scream "Injuns a-comin'!" and really believe it, too. At each alarm they would plunge ahead with renewed speed, wholly ignorant whether they were heading, only striving not to be the rearmost one in that mad, midnight race.

After the first few minutes, Sabe Sollars regained his wonted coolness, as the effects of the panic wore off, and seeing nor hearing anything of Indians in chase, he came to the conclusion that it was nothing but one of

Harry's periodical "scares." Nettled by this belief, and still sour toward the boys for overruling and laughing at his prudent advice, he resolved on having sweet revenge.

At first he had turned aside from the course taken by the boys, knowing that their screams and mad flight would surely guide the pursuers, if any there were, but now, his own fears relieved, he put on a spurt of speed and soon rejoined their trail, though some rods in their rear.

As often as the boys would slacken their speed, from fatigue, the old rascal yelled out "Injuns a-comin'" and with his hands sheltering his lips to deaden the sounds in a measure, he would utter the thrilling yell of the Sioux warrior. And just as often would the boys let out a fresh link of speed, rushing through or over all obstacles that barred the way in their mad terror—it was a marvel they did not break their necks, at a dozen different points which they somehow contrived to pass successfully, on the same principle as the drunken man problem, I suppose.

Well, to make a long story short, old Sabe kept touching the boys up and keeping them under full pressure until his tough legs cried out enough, and shortly after, that midnight race came to an end, Joe and Harry completely worn out.

Old Sabe played his part to perfection, and the boys never suspected him then, nor until he chose to make a full confession, a year afterward. He knew that there had been a mistake all through, else they would have seen the Indians long before, and by the middle of the forenoon, the boys having recovered from their scare, the party started along the back trail.

A great deal more time was consumed in going than in coming, you may be sure, though the boys were now getting angry enough to tackle an entire tribe, but Sabe would not consent to run any risk that could be avoided, making sure that the coast was clear, and that no fresh Indian sign lay along the trail, before passing on.

Owing to this, it was mid-afternoon before the camp was reached, that mad race having covered full thirty miles. And the sorest point of all was the discovery of what Harry, no doubt on starting out of a doze, had shot at—a cottonwood stump, standing at the edge of the brush, burned black!

The prints of twenty-one buckshot could be counted.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### AN OLD ENEMY TURNS UP.

DURING his second winter in the trapping-grounds, Roving Joe came near "passing in his checks" for all time.

There were six in the party that season—too

many for hiding and not enough for fighting, were the Indians to prove troublesome; but the main end in view was fun, not profit. With the exception of Joe, who had spent one winter with the traps, and with his usual modesty claimed to be an "old hand" on the strength of it, and Pete Shafer, a trapper, scout, Indian-fighter and mountain-man born and bred, the entire party were "greenhorns." Indeed, some who read this sketchy record may remember the party, as Joe wrote up the trip in a series of sketches for the SATURDAY JOURNAL, half-burlesque, half-true, some years ago.

One day Joe, either through carelessness or a slip of his foot while setting a stout beaver-trap, was caught by his left wrist. Though no bones were broken, his flesh was cut and his arm almost disabled for the time being. Pete took his round, while Joe, as being fit for nothing else with only one hand, was nominated camp-cook by acclamation.

He yielded as gracefully as might be, when one remembers how that position is dreaded and loathed, and it was while acting in this capacity that the adventure occurred which I intend narrating here.

"Head-quarters" had been fitted up for the party in a style unusually neat and comfortable for humble trappers, and while the arrangements were being made, both Pete and Joe were very free with their jokes, asking when the feather-beds and hair-mattresses were expected, etc., but before that winter was ended, both could fully appreciate the comforts of the "dug-out." Briefly described, a house of cottonwood logs was set into the hillside until only a front and part of the roof was to be seen from the outside, making a warm and snug retreat, while not being conspicuous.

One forenoon Joe was lazily cleaning up the breakfast dishes, his five mates having set out on their morning rounds, to inspect their traps, reset and bait those sprung, collect the game caught and if too cumbersome a load to "back" to camp, skin it on the spot.

The day was damp and muggy—everything out of doors telling plainly even to less experienced eyes than Joe's, that a heavy storm of some sort was brewing.

Suddenly Roving Joe heard footsteps without, and though a little surprised at such an early return, he supposed the sounds were made by some of his mates. But when the door, standing ajar, was pushed open, he realized his mistake. Three rough-looking fellows entered, stopping short as Joe jerked forth a revolver on seeing they were strangers.

"Don't burn powder, stranger," one of them hastily cried. "We're white men an' fri'nds."

"Maybe so, but friends ain't so plenty in these parts," retorted Joe, stil' on guard, but somewhat reassured as he saw that the

strangers' nands were empty—and indeed he could see no weapons whatever. "Who are you, and where did you come from?"

"We're starvin' men—for God's sake give us something to eat! It's four good days since we tasted a bit o' meat, an' we're nigh played!"

The wolfish gleam in their eyes as they eyed the smoked hams of venison and strips of buffalo "jerk" hanging from the rafters, spoke plainer than words, and Joe's suspicions fled instanter. In a moment frying-pan and spider were on the fire, but the strangers did not wait for the meat to cook, gnawing away at the dried beef like starving wolves.

The man who had spoken first, seemed to have more self-control than the rest, and between mouthfuls he told Joe their story. They were trappers, and had opened the season with an unusual run of good luck, but four days before, they had been taken by surprise by a gang of Indians, and overpowered before they could use a weapon in self-defense.

"'Twas a little streak o' luck that I knowed one o' the head devils, or I don't reckon they'd a' left us even our scalps. As it was, they'd tuck everythin' else—traps, pelts, shooters, an' even our knives, then told us to skin out an' never come back 'less we wanted to go bald-headed fer the rest o' our lives, which wouldn't be long," the fellow concluded.

While he was speaking, something told Joe that this was not their first meeting, but rack his brain as he might, he could not remember when and where he had seen the fellow before.

By this time the trappers had about satisfied their hunger, and once more Joe began to grow a little uneasy as he noted the keen glances they cast around them, over the snug dug-out, the pile of cured furs, the goody stock of provisions and extra clothing, and the weapons which hung on the wall in hooks. As there were no signs of Indians around, the boys seldom took their guns with them while making their rounds, relying on their revolvers in case of need.

For men in their destitute situation, the dug-out and its contents must seem a veritable bonanza. What if they should attempt to kill him and take possession—

Right ther' Roving Joe found the clew he had been striving after. Like a flash came back the memory of that day when he had been shot an' rolled off of his mare, Queen, and he knew that the man who had thus far acted as spokesman to the strangers, was none other than that treacherous rascal.

His hand fell upon his revolver, and he turned sharply upon the treacherous scoundrel, only to catch a glimpse of a heavy stick of firewood descending upon his head, wielded by the brawny arm of that same villain. Only the one glimpse, and he had not time to raise a

hand or even utter a cry before the blow fell with crushing force upon his head.

Roving Joe was knocked senseless, but his unconsciousness could not have lasted long. He was lying half beneath one of the low bunks, and the trappers were inspecting rifles and shot-guns, talking eagerly together. Every word was distinct to Joe, yet it seemed that he was in a dream. He could not stir, though he tried, nor could his lips shape the cry he strove to give utterance to. For the time being his body was paralyzed, only his senses of sight and hearing left him.

"It's easy enough," the man who dealt the foul blow, and the one who appeared to be the leader, was saying. "I see 'em when they left the dug-out, an' every man jack of 'em kerried a tin horn like this 'un. Thar's only one solid way to 'count fer that. Whenever one o' them horns sound, it's to call on the others fer help."

The cunning rascal had hit on the truth. Each one of the party was provided with a stout tin horn, to be carried whenever they left the dug-out. This was only to be sounded in case of danger, when aid was needed, and the others were to abandon everything else and hasten to the spot from whence the alarm proceeded. On more than one occasion that winter those horns proved a valuable addition to the trappers' outfit.

"I'll blow the durned thing—so!" and thrusting one end through a loophole, he sounded a long blast. "That'll bring them back hot foot. Thar's five in the gang, but from their looks, they ain't more'n one that knows much. *H'*s a pizen hard nut fer I know him, but I'll crack him the fust."

"Git ready, now, each to your loop. I'll fire first, then Jim, then you, Dock. That way thar won't be no two shots put in one man. We kin easy clean out the two that'll be left."

The blast of that horn and the knowledge of the deadly peril that threatened his friends, was sufficient to break the spell that bound Roving Joe. He never thought of the risk he was running, for his brain was not yet entirely clear.

Against the end wall he saw the two guns left after the three men were armed, one his own rifle, the other a double-barreled shot-gun, both loaded, 's he knew.

The three men were peering out through their ~~unseen~~ loopholes, and Joe silently rose to his feet, unseen, unheard. One swift bound carried him to the guns, and seizing his rifle, he covered the leader of the ruffians just as he wheeled, startled by the sound made when Joe leaped across the room.

He may have realized his peril, but he surely had time for no more before he fell in a heap, blood and brains oozing from a round hole in his forehead, stone dead!

Quick as thought Joe caught up the shot-gun, raising both hammers as the weapon came to his shoulder, and cried:

"Drop your weapons and up with your hands, or I'll blow daylight through ye both!"

The hammers of their weapons were down. Before they could raise them the youngster could kill one after the other. They saw this—saw, too, by the corpse of their leader that Roving Joe would shoot, and shoot to kill—and down dropped their stolen rifles, up went their hands.

"Stir one inch either way, and I'll kill you," added Joe, the double muzzle of his gun moving from one to the other.

The tables were turned, with a vengeance!

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### BORDER LAW.

IT was an awkward situation for the ruffians—"held up" by a beardless boy whom they had believed wholly out of the fight, if not killed by that treacherous stroke. But what could they do? Roving Joe swore that he would fire at their first motion, and that he meant business, was proven plain enough by the corpse of their chief lying there in a

steadily widening pool of blood before their faces. And sooner or later they knew that the boy's friends would return, hastened by that unlucky blast of the horn.

"Steady!" cried Joe, in sharp warning, as he fancied he could detect signs of a movement about to be risked by the cornered rascals. "I'll blow you through if you move so much as a finger—mind that!"

Still, despite the great advantage he held, perhaps it was well that this state of affairs did not last long. Ten minutes, not more, then Joe heard the rapid trampling of human feet nearing the dug-out, and knew that his friends had hastened to answer in person the alarm-horn. Yet he did not move until there came a rapid pounding on the barred door, and the eager, excited voice of old Pete Shafer:

"Open up—how is it, Joe? What's the row?"

"Nothing much," responded our hero, taking one side step toward the door, but instantly changing his mind as he caught the desperate gleam in the eyes of his nearest captive, for he knew that he was in greater peril now than at any moment since shooting the traitor. "Too busy to bother—take a log and burst in the door—be in a hurry, too!"

Joe was an inveterate joker, but now there was something in his tones that told his friends he was in deadly earnest, and they quickly followed his advice.

Joe slowly slid away from the door, keeping the two fellows alternately covered by the moving shot-gun, not giving them the slightest chance to risk a sudden assault before the door was driven from its hinges and the amateur trappers, headed by Pete Shafer, rushed into the dug-out. Then it was too late, and they sullenly submitted to be bound, hand and foot.

The corpse was dragged outside and left for the time being. The pool of blood was covered over with ashes, and then Roving Joe was asked to give a full account of the affair.

There was nothing said to that effect, nor, at the moment, did any of the party think of such a thing, but from the very first the recital or charge and hearing took the appearance of a miniature court—Roving Joe acting as witness and prosecuting attorney. Pete Shafer as judge, the four amateur trappers filling the position of jury. This semblance was still further heightened when Pete, after Joe concluded, asked the prisoners what they had to offer in their defense.

The two rascals, bound hand and foot, had been propped in a sitting posture against one of the bunks. Both opened their lips to make answer at the same time, but Pete raised his hand and checked them.

"One at a time is plenty. You, Dan Keifer, spit it out."

"Twas all 'long o' Dick Amberley;—" began the fellow, but Pete cut him short.

"Dick Amberley's dead, an' a pizen good thing, too, fer he's been a cuss an' disgrace to all honest men ever sence he was fust hatched; but it ain't fer you to throw dirt. Tell a straight story, an' cut it off as short as ye kin."

"Tain't flingin' dirt to tell the truth," growled Keifer. "Dick was boss, an' we jist followed his lead. 'You won't let me tell the truth, I don't see the use o' sayin' anythin'."

"Go on your own way, but git it over as quick as ye kin," snapped Shafer, as the prisoner ceased speaking, sullen and defiant.

"All right. Don't make much difference one way or t'other. You've got the under-grip onto us this time, an' nobody ever knowed *you* to let up on a man you didn't like," growled the fellow, sulkily.

"You'll hev as fa'r a trial as if it was afore the biggest court in the land, an' you won't git no more punishment then is your jest dues," was the equitable retoart.

"Talk's cheap—but I don't keer much. The boy that tells a straight story, so far as he knows it,

An' it was all straight work with us until we struck this outfit, too. The reds cleaned us out, an' set us adrift without grub or means for gettin' any, not leavin' us even a knife to make snare or trap with. Four days an' not a bite. Then we struck this place almost starved out.

"Dick was out skirmishin' fer some sort o' feed, when he saw you five set out fer your traps, leaving this boy alone. He come back fer us, an' we didn't lose no time, you kin bet, we was that nigh starved!

"The boy treated us like white men, when we told him our story, an' at that time I don't reckon any one o' us meant to make him trouble. But it was a pizen big temptation to men cleaned out like us to see the weapons, the piles o' grub an' all that, knowin' as we did that a big snow storm was comin'. But even countin' all that in, I don't think we'd a played the boy dirt, only Dick, as he told us afterwards, rec gnized him. Some years ago, Dick tuck the boy's hoss, shootin' an' thinkin' he'd killed him, but that he was wrong, for a couple o' nights after the lad broke Dick's left arm and run off all the three bosses."

"Skip that part; we know it a'ready," said Shafer.

"Waal, as he told us, after knockin' the boy over, Dick was afear'd he'd be recognized, an' we all be turned out in the storm, so he made up his mind to take possession. You know how we slipped up on it, dad, so that ain't no use in sayin' any more, as I see."

"You 'lowed to knock us over when we come up in answer to the horn?" asked Shafer.

"Sartin. What else could we do, after Dick set the ball a-rollin'?"

"That's a-plenty. You 'tended to murder us, 'thout givin' us a chance for our lives. Sech men as you be, ain't fit to live!" exclaimed Pete, then turning to the amateur trappers, he added: "You hearn what he said, boys. How is it—guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty, of course!" was the unanimous response.

"That settles it!" and Pete arose, his blue ey's gleaming sternly. "Such cusses as you two ain't no more fit to live than a mad wolf. I don't want to dirty the floor any more, so I'll take ye out to the crick—"

"Hold on, Pete—what do you mean?" cried Joe, alarmed by the words and demeanor of the stern trapper.

"To serve them just as they 'lowed to serve us all—blow thar pizen brains out!" was the hot response.

"No you don't!" and Roving Joe pushed the angry man back. "Help, boys! Don't let's stand by and see murder done. Bad as these fellows are, they're too good for that!"

Not knowing Shafer as thoroughly as Joe, the boys had believed he was only trying to scare the prisoners, really meaning them no further harm,

but at this appeal, they ranged themselves along side Roving Joe.

"I don't want to hurt none o' ye, boys, but ye'd better step aside," said Shafer, quietly, almost softly; but his blue eyes were blazing, and there was death in his face.

"Nor are we spoiling for a muss, Pete," replied Joe, not one whit less resolutely, "but you've got to do more than hurt some of us before you can butcher these fellows. I like you better than any man I know, outside of relatives, but I swear that I'll blow your brains out the instant that you lift a weapon against either of these two men!"

It may be doubted whether there was another person living who could have faced Pete Slater down after this fashion. But Joe was a special favorite, and knowing the old trapper's love for him, he made the hazardous venture—and won.

Pete yielded, and after a brief conversation, the two men were turned loose, given dried meat enough to last them a week, and warned not to be caught skulking near those premises on penalty of being shot down without mercy. Suddenly, without a word of thanks, they left the dug-out and strode away, just as the first big snowflakes began to fall upon the earth.

For four days and nights the snow fell without an hour's cessation. The dug-out was buried beneath the snow, and for nearly a month the trappers did little more than eat and sleep, for the snow was too deep and the cold too intense for them to think of working their traps.

Not until the spring thaw came did our friends learn what had become of Dan Keifer and his mate, though they knew that hardly one chance in a thousand was in favor of their escaping with life through that fearful storm. Nor had they.

Shafer found their bodies and buried them.

## CHAPTER XV.

### CONCLUSION.

ONLY a few of the more prominent incidents in the life of Roving Joe have been given here. My most perplexing task has been not what to write, but what to omit.

At the outset, I intended giving some account of his life in the mines—for Roving Joe hunted and found gold in the Black Hills long before the earliest days of Deadwood—but I have already overrun my limits as to space.

A few last words about Roving Joe, and I am done.

Until he was twenty-nine years old, Joe lived a bachelor. Then he married, and settled down in a quiet little Kansas village, where he still lives, varying his writing with an occasional hunting and fishing trip. The old "prairie fever" still lingers in his veins, but for the sake of his wife and family, he keeps it in subjection.

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